

An Aldermaston childhood

By Richard Howman

Our family moved to the Hind's Head Hotel in Aldermaston in 1955 (Wartime rationing ended the year before) and we lived in Aldermaston until 1963; my Parents, Robert 'Bob' and Hilda Pauline Howman, were Tenants of Wethered's Brewery. Dad was born in Reading in 1920 and in 1939 had volunteered as for Regular service in the Royal Navy. He joined the Fleet Air Arm, serving firstly in the Arctic and Atlantic campaigns on the Cruiser *HMS Nigeria* as an Air Mechanic, and later in the Pacific campaign aboard the Aircraft Carrier *HMS Unicorn*. My Mother was born in Eversley in 1923 and also had strong family ties in Reading. At age seventeen Hilda volunteered to serve in the Royal Air Force (Women's Auxiliary Air Force, 'WAAF') in which Service she worked in Intelligence roles, particularly in the critical 'Plotter' activities which enabled RAF responses to incoming enemy aircraft to be organised.

I was the 'middle child' of three siblings, with an older sister (Pauline) and a younger sister (Elizabeth). We sadly lost our elder brother Robert Anthony before we moved to Aldermaston from Eastern Avenue in Reading. Mum and Dad had never run a Pub/Hotel before, but both sets of Grandparents were experienced Publicans. My paternal Grandparents ran the Little Crown in Southampton Street, Reading (having previously run the 'Premier' in Caversham Road, Reading) whilst my maternal Grandparents had run 'The Reindeer' and 'Osborne Arms' in Reading, and later, the Church Place Inn in Harberton, Devon. Nevertheless, it was a brave decision to take a young family into a new rural home and start a Business amidst the uncertainties of Fifties Britain.

The family arrived in Aldermaston as Britain struggled to adjust to the new post-war world era and the presence of the AWRE was tangible proof of the developing Nuclear shadow beneath which the world now lived. It was a time of social adjustment and national recovery but in the wake of another World War the 'Establishment' was being questioned and challenged as never before. For a very young child whose only experience of home had been a red brick semi-detached house in a suburban street in Reading, the Hind's Head presented a vast and rambling home which offered a blend of excitement and gentle fear. Excitement because there were so many rooms and floors to explore and to get lost in, but fear too. The narrow, cobweb draped, dusty winding stairs to the Clock Tower attic for example were dark and creaked spookily and there were tales of ghosts; we were assured that at least one of these had visited us on arrival.

The beating heart of the family part of the Pub was of course the Kitchen, dominated as it was by a giant blue and grey stove-enamelled iron 'Esse' Range cooker. The Esse was a monster which consumed copious quantities of Coke/Anthracite, so a ready supply was kept close-by in a large coal scuttle which was used to pour in fuel through apertures in the Esse's Iron-flat flat surface in which heavy iron circular plugs had to be lifted-out with a hooked iron rod to allow refuelling. When the beast was fired-up the burning coke spewed out acrid fumes, although these settled when the fuel was glowing rather than flaming. Two giant square spring-hinged chromed buffers on top of the Esse maintained the surface cooking heat and there were ovens also. The thick iron surface of the Esse cooker glowed dull cherry-red at full temperature and during the winter cold it was a warming and welcoming friend.

The kitchen of the Hind's Head was at once a thoroughfare to the adjoining Scullery and Bars and a family room too, with a black and white TV and a maroon and beige Decca Wireless on a shelf above it. The Kitchen floor was 'Lino' covered; the Hinds Head was a Lino palace. I remember listening to 'Sing Something Simple' and 'Family Favourites' on the radio. There were oft repeated American

films on TV and series such as 'War at Sea' and 'The Great War'. When I was very young, I watched Muffin the Mule, Andy Pandy and The Flowerpot Men and I read Comic Books (including Superman!) and Comics, The Victor, Valiant, Eagle, Hotspur. At Christmas time we had a small tree and homemade decorations, paper chains assembled from gummed paper strips, which we draped from the ceiling. My parents rested and slept on easy chairs in this room after the morning-to-lunchtime service hours until evening opening; Licensing hours were different then and it was physically hard work to sustain such a large Pub. Unlike modern Pub Managers today who have a Company salary, Brewery Tenants were fully self-employed people who had to generate their own income. The family ate in the Kitchen too and on Sundays we children each had specific jobs to do to prepare for lunch; I collected and arranged chairs around the extending oak table whilst my sisters laid the cloths (there were usually two cloths, a thick under-cloth and a finer top cloth) and set the table for the meal. Even as youngsters we took wine with our Sunday lunch; whenever we visited our Grandparents my Grandmother always treated me to a small glass of Port.

Adjoining the Kitchen was a small (big by today's domestic standards) walk-in Larder and also a Scullery. The Scullery was a working room with a cast iron stove/burner which heated the water and a huge insulation-wrapped hot water cylinder also sat in one corner of the room. Like the Kitchen Esse, the Scullery stove too had to be fed regularly with coke and one of the old outbuildings served as a huge Coal shed to which we ventured at all hours to replenish stocks. The open fires throughout the Pub consumed coal so our coal shed was a multi-fuel repository containing both Coal and Coke/Anthracite and at a young age I knew the difference between these fuels. Another outbuilding served as a woodshed and evening replenishment visits during dark winter nights were quite scary for a youngster, walking out to the Coal shed with a wavering blinking torch in one hand and coal scuttle which to scoop-up coal or coke in the other.

The Scullery also boasted a large porcelain Butler sink and we had a domestic Washing Machine with old manual Mangle for squeezing out water from wet clothes. A large wooden table in the Scullery was used to prepare sandwiches for Customers and at peak times we children helped to butter bread. The Hind's Head was known for good lunches and Mum used to prepare hearty home-made soups on the Esse cooker in the winter; she'd attended a Catering Course in Reading and her Pub food was ahead of its time. The Scullery had a single window which looked out into the yard behind the Pub and an external door gave access to the garden and outbuildings. The door to the Scullery from the Kitchen was one of five doors in that room. A second gave access to the Larder, a third to a flight of stairs to the first floor, a fourth led to the Bar(s) and a fifth to a large corridor/hallway which housed a pay telephone and an old 'Press' containing catering china. The telephone in the corridor was a black wall-mounted steel and Bakelite 'push-button' type, as in contemporary 'phone boxes, with white lettering on the body and chrome push-buttons (Buttons 'A' and 'B'); the telephone number was Woolhampton 407. Pub Customers also used this 'phone. Our 'phone lines were cut once as part of a failed burglary; my Mum's barking miniature Poodle distracted the would-be thieves. A narrow curving staircase led from this 'phone hallway to the first floor; I recall six staircases in all in the Pub.

The Kitchen door to the Bars was glazed with opaque glass, in fact there were two doors between the Kitchen and the Bars creating a virtual an airlock, and in between these two was a third door giving access to the Cellar. During busy times in the Bars the buzz and babble of customers could be heard through these doors. The orangey-red brick floored Cellar had a Mezzanine timber section on which were stacked crates of Beer and Minerals whilst a lower section contained wooden beer barrels mounted on stands with their arterial pipes leading up to the Bars above. A small vaulted section of the Cellar contained Wines and Spirits. At times the Cellar would flood partially with

wonderfully crystal-clear water rising through the brick floor; I can't remember it ever reaching the level of the barrels though. I used to fly home-made balsa wood gliders across the cellar. The rounded brick steps from the Bar to the Cellar also reflected different times in respect of Health and Safety though and Dad once slipped on these eroded bricks and fell to the Cellar floor unconscious. I remember seeing him afterwards laying on a sofa in the Kitchen, sweating profusely. Doctor Wyn-Thomas was called and stitched Dad's gashed head with black horsehair stitches.

An exciting highlight of Pub life was the regular visits of 'The Draymen' who came to replenish our Cellar stocks and I used to watch as their big glossy green and gold painted Wethered's 'Dray' lorry parked at the side of the Pub, where firstly a wall gate and then the double wooden doors of the Cellar gave access. When the Cellar doors were opened a substantial twin-rail wooden slide joined by iron rods, like a huge ladder without rungs, was used by the Draymen to slide the heavy wooden full beer barrels on ropes down into the Cellar (there were no steel kegs). When the men hefted the heavy full barrels from the lorry, they did so onto a heavy hemp woven sack-sized 'pillow' which cushioned their fall. The Draymen were strong fellows and wore leather aprons and broad leather belts. After they'd loaded and unloaded and all stock-checking was completed, they would eat in the Public Bar and drink a pint or two. Different times.

There were two Bars in the Hinds Head, the Lounge Bar and the Public Bar and both were modified structurally shortly after we arrived; a massive ancient Oak beam supported the Lounge Bar floor. The arrangements in each Bar were conventional with a Bar counter, stools and seats, tables and fireplaces in both Bars and a Dartboard in the Public Bar. Playing cards (With a Guinness Harp logo) and dominoes were available, as well as a Cribbage board. There was also a Bar Billiards table in the Public Bar. The floor in the Public Bar was quarry-tiled and that of the Lounge was carpeted; I sometimes did my homework in the Lounge Bar, though not often. The day after my Grandfather died it was in the Lounge Bar that my Dad gave me my Grandfather's Half-Hunter pocket watch. I still have it of course.

A lovely lady called Mrs Davis cycled-in from Beenham to help clean the Pub. Either her son or her husband (I don't recall which now, but I remember the name Henry) liked to assemble Airfix aircraft models as did I; she brought one to me once, a WW II Typhoon. Two other regular helpers in the Hind's Head were Ron and Rene Hutchins who lived in the Council houses, and they worked behind the Bar at busy times. Rene had a Corgi dog called Brandy (which bit me once) and Ron (once a Shepherd I think) had served in the Royal Navy during the War, as had Dad of course. Ron's ship had been one of the old ex-American 'Lend Lease' vessels. Ron and Rene had a son, Roger, who used to wear a black leather jacket when they were popular. I was watching TV in Mr and Mrs Hutchins' house when President Kennedy was assassinated.

The ground floor room in the Hind's Head which is now called 'The Officers Mess' was previously called simply the Dining Room and was used for Functions. There were old Prints/Engravings from the Victorian 'Cries of London' series around the walls, which was fitting, as the Hinds Head had been a Coaching Inn and many of the scenes portrayed in these Prints were coaching scenes. There was also large oak Dresser from which my Mum's prized antique clock, a family piece, was stolen one day. I used to play in the Dining Room with my Corgi and Dinky toys; the pattern on the carpet served as roadways for these model cars and trucks. A long oak dining table in the room was served by ranks of brass-studded brown wood and leather dining chairs.

Along the hallway from the Dining Room a lovely curving staircase rose to the first floor and to the 'Games Room', a large well-proportioned Reception Room which was hired-out for Wedding Receptions and Masonic functions etc; there was a piano in this room in which my elder Sister

sometimes played her early Beatles records on a 'Dansette' record player. I used to set-up my train set there too. Above the Games room were two distant attic rooms with Dormer windows (probably once they were Servants Quarters) in which my elder sister and I slept during the Summer months. In the winter we moved back down onto the first floor where I slept above the Cellar overlooking the Post Office. The attic room floors were lino covered (blue/grey) of course, no carpet, so everything echoed and felt cold. There was always suspense when we could hear Dad climbing the stairs, his footfall echoing throughout the dark stairwell and attic space. There was a small window from a half-landing on the attic stairs and curiosity once propelled me through this window and onto the roof which I climbed to the Clock tower; probably not an activity for today's children. I also managed to break a large skylight once with my leather, bladder-inflated laced-up football whilst playing in the Yard. Interestingly, Dad always forbade me from heading the ball.

The Yard itself was at once a playground, a car park and a gathering place for the Beagle pack. The Beagles were always transported in an old minibus type of vehicle and were followed on foot in the cross-country hunt, unlike their 'posher' counterparts of the South Berkshire Hunt, who followed their hounds mounted. I was in the 'Rec' once when the Hunt galloped past in the next field pursuing a Hare. I recall vividly the bulging eyes of the terror-stricken animal as it sped with every ounce of energy it could muster from the baying hounds to save its own life. It was and remains a lasting and deep-seated memory.

I learned to ride a bike on the gravelled surface in the Car Park of the Hind's Head, having previously pedalled my blue and silver pedal car 'The Silverstone Special' across the same surface. Sometimes Dad had time to kick a football in the yard too and the black-painted doors of the double garage served as a goal. The gravel surface was unkind to laced leather footballs though and the gravel scuffed them badly. There were outbuildings around the Yard, most of which have now gone though some remain. On entering the Car Park today, the building immediately to the left of the gate (small Lizards used to bask in the sun on the bank outside this gate) used to be an open-fronted garage and was formerly a Wagon house, or similar, with loft above it. Mr Ball (from the Council Houses, he had a daughter called Susan and other children) used to keep his car there; it was a Morris 1000 or similar. I spoke to him once when he was brush-painting his car, describing the new colour to me as 'Mushroom'. We stored apples in the loft, which was dry and cool, and the fruit preserved very well and could be eaten for many months. Our own family garage was next door to Mr Ball's and had black painted double doors. The next building along, being separated by an enclosed square of open ground with a wonderful Greengage tree, had also been a Wagon or Coach house and several people kept cars therein. David Joliffe was one of them and he owned a red 'frog-eyed Sprite' I recall. Another man who kept a car in the Hind's Head Yard was Mr Tippler, who drove a brownish three-wheeler, not unlike a Reliant Robin in appearance; Mr Tipler worked at the Pottery. In the Yard there was also a cattle truck owned by Wally Head, who famously drove huge distances delivering and collecting cattle.

Other (now demolished buildings) formed a small 'hollow square' off the Yard. One, with a major double height double door had clearly been a Coach house, with adjoining stables with hay lofts. We called these buildings 'The Stables'. There were also single-storey Mews-style buildings in brick, though these were in a state of disrepair even then and have since been demolished. We played in all these dusty old and dark buildings, finding and playing with old tools such as long and bendy two-man Saws with huge teeth. One of the 'Stables' served as a woodshed in which wasps usually nested, and I recall cutting kindling for the Pub Fireplaces with a small hatchet there even at a very young age. Ever unsupervised (I use the phrase in thanks not in criticism) we climbed into Lofts, we burrowed through holes in walls, we played with sharp objects in dark and dusty outbuildings. Once

I pulled-up in surprise to find a pig's head salting in a terracotta vat; my Dad was preparing Brawn, but I didn't know anything about it, so it was a bit of a shock. When Dr Barbara Moore's CND Marchers reached Aldermaston to protest against Nuclear Weapons, some of the Marchers (they were often called 'Beatniks' then, now they would probably be 'Hippies') used to take refuge in the Stables and Dad would have to go out at dead of night to evict them. Part of the main Pub building was an empty dusty facility we called 'The Brew House', a first-floor area with an exterior loading door, now converted to a Restaurant I believe. The Brew House was used to prepare beer from raw materials, and I recall a large timber hopper therein for Hops and a big iron wheel, both of which were discarded on conversion of the building. I accidentally left my toy truck in The Brew House when we moved to Reading. A smaller detached building just outside the Scullery door was called 'The Game Larder' and it was equipped with a selection of hooks from which Game could be hung.

Behind the Stables was the Hind's Head vegetable garden which was cared for by the Gardener, 'Kewey'. He double-dug the huge beds and planted vegetables, greens and beans, onions etc; there were several fruit trees therein, apples particularly, and a memorable Lilac bush; the aroma of Lilac remains the most nostalgic of aromas to me and always carries me back to that garden and my childhood. Kewey's sanctuary was a small brick tool shed. When we'd arrived at the Hind's Head the vegetable garden was twice as big, but half of it was sold-off by the Brewery and the Vicarage was built on the land. Of course, we clambered unchallenged up the scaffolding of the new building to explore and play. Many of the apple trees were on that part of the vegetable garden which was sold off by the Brewery. Once, the three of us 'ran away' but got as far only as the Vicarage garden with an old Tent. I think we were back in the Hind's Head for Tea. In the field behind the Vegetable garden was a field in which local Farmer Bertie Summers kept a racehorse called Blackheath; a beautiful horse. We used to take apples to Blackheath the other horses which oft grazed in the fields beyond the Rec'.

The pressure of running a full time Business precluded much gardening, so the domestic section of the Hind's Head garden was largely untended. However, the three of us each had little sections of garden for ourselves in which we grew mainly flowers; I remember Asters especially. We poked at the ground and tended it with improvised tools; sticks etc. and arranged stones to mark-out our territories. A superb tall Acacia tree dominated the garden and a swing dangled on long ropes from a high lateral branch. Several mature yew trees bordered the garden and provided good climbing. The uppermost branches of the Yews flexed excitingly in the wind but afforded wonderful views. The wonderful Acacia was felled after we left the Pub, but it had been unclimbable for youngsters owing to the lack of lower branches. It remained an object of unfulfilled ambition.

I played in this garden with my best friend Brian 'Tubby' Marshall (my other village friends included Simon Ford, Graham Cotterell, Barry Woodley, and Bernard Stokes). The Marshalls lived in the first Council house and Brian had an elder brother called Dennis and a younger sister called Helen. I would call for Brian, knocking on the gloss Estate green-painted side door of the Council house (their garden was always immaculate compared to ours) or Brian would call round for me at the back door of the Hind's Head (I recall a travelling Brush Salesman with a suitcase full of brush samples calling regularly at this same door). We played Cowboys and Indians in the Hind's Head garden, improvising horses from wooden beer crates; the Wethered's crates were the best, both in proportion and strength, with the Schweppes crates, slightly orange in colour, as the next best. We built beer crate houses and dens and crate tanks, using fence posts as gun barrels. We fought wars, heavily influenced by contemporary American War films on TV, and sometimes we just sat in the sunshine. Mum used to bring out fizzy drinks and buns to keep us energised. Sometimes Dad was able to come out too and I remember playing Cricket with him using a beer crate as a wicket. I was

fortunate that a Pub customer always provided a 'Stuart Surrige' cricket bat, so I was well equipped. I used to work fragrant Linseed oil into the Willow, rendering it a warm (and fragrant) golden hue.

The garden boundary with the wider world was marked by a six-foot fence/wall adjoining the Rec' and a brick wall adjoining the road. The fence was no obstacle; it was instead an invitation. I ventured frequently into the Rec' and sometimes, though not often, played football there. We boys also laboured to cut slender Yew branches to make bows and we cut arrows from other trees, shaping the front of these with pen knives to weight them for flight and to sharpen them. We competed in the Rec' for distance with these sophisticated weapons and were able to shoot arrows the full length of the Rec's football pitch, from one goalmouth to the other. A ditch to one side of the Rec' served as a site for Dens, whilst an infant's sandpit provided a testing ground for the experimental use of 'Penny Bangers' which we were able to purchase from the Post office prior to Fireworks Night (we didn't call it Bonfire Night). When the Swings were first installed in the Rec' (heavy iron chains and wooden seats) we swung as high as possible and jumped-off, competing for distance. Eventually there was also a Seesaw. A basic concrete block shelter with a corrugated steel roof was erected for Footballers but we used it as a platform to jump of and I was about ten years old when I saw an Aldermaston young couple making love beside this Shelter. When the Rec' grass was cut by a tractor-towed gang-mower we gathered the cuttings into shapes and mounds to create little Dens and enclosures in which to play.

The Rec' was bounded against the road by an iron Estate-style fence with two gates; a 'Kissing gate' and a vehicle double gate. A gentleman called Mr King (he always wore a tie) used to bring his Great Dane dog 'Major' to the Rec' where the huge dog raced around at high speed. We were too afraid to go in when the dog was there. The village Lock-Up was in the corner of the Rec' and adjoined the Hind's Head garden. The history of the Lock-Up was the subject of much imaginative speculation amongst us children. I used to walk along the high brick wall of the Hind's Head garden to climb onto the roof of the Lock-Up, from which jumping was the preferred dismount technique.

When we were first in Aldermaston The Flower Show was held in the flat field adjoining the Rec'. It was never quite the same after it moved to the Mill. It was a controversial decision at the time and many Aldermaston villagers felt they had been robbed of their Show and never attended it again; it was as if it had left the Village. In fact, it had. It was different thereafter. In the Rec' there was always great anticipation before The Flower Show. Firstly, we children watched as the tents arrived and the big show tent was erected. As soon as the workmen left the site we ran to this tent and climbed up to the ridge of it to slide down the sloping canvas roof again and again and sometimes we would be chased off. There were races and Flower Show categories especially for children to enter, including miniature gardens, painting etc., but some of the categories have now been eliminated. For example, there was one category for the biggest collection of Cabbage White Butterflies, so before the Show we all ran to the Allotments to hunt down these poor insects. As ever there was a functional reason for this contest as it helped to preserve the cabbages etc. Nevertheless, I remember helping a friend to accumulate over five hundred plus Butterflies which won the rosette one year. The big Show tent was crammed with exhibits, many of a very high standard and since the Villagers were ardent and expert gardeners the Produce items in the Show Tent were ever exceptional. The fragrance of the combined fruit' flowers and vegetables in the humid warmth of the tent was memorable and there was of course a busy Beer tent which the Hind's Head supported.

Beyond the Rec' were fields in which I wandered freely as far as the River Enbourne, upon which we floated improvised rafts even though we could not swim. The Enbourne was a beautiful river, not

too big to be daunting and with crystal clear water with vibrant green plant growth swaying beneath the surface in the significant current; today, a Parent's nightmare. I was able to roam alone and freely in the natural environment which Aldermaston presented, unsupervised in any way. At Harvest time the red Massey Ferguson Combine Harvester from the Farm cut the crop and sent clouds of musty fragments of straw high into the balmy air; that's another scent which is embedded in my memory. Straw bales were stacked ready for collection and these stacks became Castles, Houses, objects of play, whilst the spiky cut stems which remained in the ground scratched our legs and made them sore.

Elsewhere in Aldermaston we wandered along Fisherman's Lane to play on Haystacks (Dave Luker used to chase us off) or push our way into the timber sheds which housed the Willow cords which were seasoning ready to be turned into cricket bats, or we'd jump around on sacks of flour in the barn on the farm, dodging the rats, or we cast primitive lines optimistically for fish at the Brick Arch. If timing was good, I might pass-by the Milking Parlour in time to be offered a ladle of milk from the Aluminium cooler across which the freshest of fresh milk cascaded before churning. A walk along Wasing Lane led to the Mount Estate, where we squeezed in through the treeline at the edge of the fields to play in the stream and to build small secret shelters amongst the trees, ever wary of being caught. The Village Cricket team always used a more conventional entry point; the front gate. With Dad and Mum busy in the Hind's Head, the woods, fields and rivers were my playground, either with friends or alone. I had my own world in Aldermaston.

A brief word about cars. My first recollection of our family car was of a black Jaguar with 'running-boards'. It sticks in my memory because I was travelling home from Reading in it one day with my Dad when we crashed in Calcot and the car overturned. Luckily, we were both unhurt, there were no seatbelts of course. Our next car was a Ford Zephyr, which looked very modern at the time and which was the first car we had with a front bench-seat; it was a sort of turquoise colour. The Zephyr gave way to an Embassy Maroon Austin Westminster with 'Overdrive' and tan leather upholstery, in which my Dad later (1965) drove at 100 mph on the M1, shortly before the Motorway speed limit was introduced. He disliked the concept of a speed limit, but these were changing times! Dad had served in the Fleet Air Arm and had a different 'take' on speed.

We children attended Primary schools in Reading. I went to The No. IX Preparatory School in Christchurch Gardens and my sisters attended The Abbey Junior School. (Note: The Headmaster of No IX was a retired Major from the Lincolnshire Regiment and he was an advocate of caning boys, which he did frequently. Sometimes he hit us with a stick; he broke one on my back in Class one day, but I never mentioned it to my Parents). Dad drove us in and out of Reading every day during term time which was an onerous addition to running the Pub. At age 9 or 10 I started taking the Bus from Reading Station to the Hare and Hounds bus stop in Tadley, where either Dad or a Sparks taxi picked me up. I was released early from school early once because of extreme foggy conditions but there was no 'phone link working to alert my parents. When I left the bus early at the Hare and Hounds Bus Stop I decided to start walking through the fog to Aldermaston. I got quite a long way before Dad came out to find me and he gave me half-a-crown for 'using my initiative'.

Remembering War dead was an important activity when we first lived in Aldermaston. After all it was barely ten years since the end of WW II when we arrived in the Village and only thirty-seven years since the end of WW I. Hence, there were War Veterans from both conflicts in the village and contrastingly, also men who were exempted from War Service owing to their reserved occupations, which included many in Agriculture. I remember a squad of Village War Veterans forming-up in front of the Hind's Head. They snapped to attention on command, medals glistening in the cold November sunshine, and marched up the hill to mark Remembrance (we actually marked Armistice

Day then) in the Church. At their head marched Charlie Nash, his white gauntlets holding aloft the British Legion Standard behind which the men marched. It made a very deep impression on me; the men I saw in the Village from day to day were very different on Armistice Day; Dad never wore his medals.

We all have locations which we remember fondly, places in which we have lived, places we have visited, places with special associations for various reasons. But Aldermaston holds more than ordinary memories for me. The village and its rural way of life shaped me and my character and provided continuity as society and social attitudes changed. The Seasons were distinct and meant something then. The great contradiction was that whilst Aldermaston hosted an Establishment which was at the forefront of Atomic Weapon technology on the one hand, it also hosted and sustained a rural way of life and rural values which have now passed into memory and cannot be regained. In some respects, it may have seemed to be a period of social naivety by today's standards, but it was innocence, and it was a more honest and genuine Community for all that.

Aldermaston was a place which bit out a little piece of my heart and kept it forever; Aldermaston memories travel with me and within me even now. I can close my eyes and see the sparkling water of the Enbourne, I can inhale the musty scent of freshly harvested straw, the intoxicating aroma of Lilac in the Vegetable garden, the scent of crushed Bay leaves from the bush behind the Stables. Once, many years later, I landed at undeveloped Muscat Airport in Oman en route to the troubled Dhofar Province as an Infantry Officer, and as I walked from the 'plane in the oven-temperature heat, I passed through an arcade of Bougainvillea which had been freshly watered. That fusion of floral scent, warmth and humidity took me straight back to the Flower Show Produce tent in Aldermaston. It was a great comfort. I have travelled widely since I was a child and seen and done many things, but my soul lies yet in Aldermaston's fields and woods.

Richard Howman

People I remember...

- Ron and Rene Hutchins, Roger. Lived in the Council houses helped at the Hind's Head, Ron served in the RN, Rene had a Corgi named Brandy and a son, Roger
- Mrs Davis – Cleaner at the Hind's Head. Son/Husband? Henry. Cycled in from Beenham
- The Woodleys – Charlie, the Patriarch, worked on the farm. I remember seeing him walking to work on the Farm in his blue overalls and boots. There were sons Barry, they called him 'Boy' (of my age, a friend) and older brothers Andy + ? Joe Kauffman, a lodger and post-war immigrant. (German?) lived in the Council house with them
- David Jolliffe – Owned a red Frog-eyed Sprite, kept it in a garage at the Hind's Head
- Mr Summers – Notable local Farmer, owner of 'Blackheath' a Racehorse
- Harry Bowden – Local Farmer, drove an old dark matt Green Van and wore an old Panama-style hat
- Stanley Young, Vicar – lived in Vicarage next to Hind's Head
- Mr Tippler – Worked at Pottery, short and bearded, drove a battered three-wheeler which he kept in the Hind's Head yard
- Wally Head – Cattleman, Driver, long haul, kept lorry in Hind's Head yard
- Bernard Stokes – Friend (same age), we met-up many, many years later at the Flower Show
- Simon Ford – Friend (same age), his Dad ran a Garage in the Street and once welded-up my 'Silverstone Special' pedal car. Simon had a blue and white bike.
- Graham Cotterell – Friend (same age), with sisters Josie (older) and Beryl (younger)
- Bernard Coker – An older boy, black bicycle
- Paul Dale – An older boy, wore 'winkle pickers'
- Sir William Mount – the Estate etc
- The Arlotts – Ben and family, successful Flower Show exhibitors – regular winners for veg' – Family at The Old Mill
- Dave Luker – Farm worker, lived in the Street?
- Henry Tull - lived opposite the Post Office
- George and Mrs Heighton – ran the Post Office/Shop, son (Robert?) served in the Met' Police, I used to buy Penny Bangers and Rockets and 'Applecham'. There were returnable deposits on glass bottles, we loved Sherbert Fountains with liquorice straws
- 'Snuffy' - The Village Policeman
- Mr Papps – Ran the 'Butt Inn', Tadley, drove a van with 'PG Tips' banners
- Mr Saddington – Tadley Greengrocer shop, Cockney, drove a Ford Anglia
- 'Auntie Hilda' – Elderly single lady, regularly rode a black bike to the Hind's Head (I used to take secret rides on it when she was in the Pub and ride around the Rec'). Hilda used to take a few bottles of Guinness home. I sensed she had some 'history', a story to tell
- Mr King – Great Dane called 'Major' in the Rec
- 'Kewey' - Hind's Head gardener, lived alone, had a 'Victorian look'
- Charlie Nash British Legion Standard Bearer, white gauntlets, led Remembrance Parades
- Norman and Vera (wore beret) Sparks – Tadley Taxis, Vera drove a green and black Vauxhall with wings
- Gerard McGlen – Friend, house opposite Hind's Head, attended Presentation College, Reading
- Mr Eastop – Aldermaston Pottery – made the Hind's Head Jugs
- Dr Wyn-Thomas – Doctor, attended me when I had serious Pneumonia and Mumps, and stitched Dad after his Cellar fall
- The Hartrees – Friend, William (son) attended No IX School in Reading with me – he was always sick in the car!
- Simon Jenner – Older boy – family lived above Post office?
- Chris Chapman and Keith Chapman, grandson? (Now Malthouse Cottages), Gypsy??
- Dr Gobey - Dentist

Some random things...

- We made family visits to Reading, to the Odeon Cinema and Pantomime (the Theatre was demolished as part of the Butts Centre redevelopment)
- We enjoyed occasional days out at the seaside when the business allowed, to Southsea and Hayling Island, stopping on the way at other Pubs (we never took a family holiday from the Hind's Head)
- Barter was a regular Aldermaston activity. I remember a side of bacon coming into the Pub once and beer going out; I found a whole Salmon hanging outside the Scullery door once
- Bay Tree – outside The Stables in the vegetable garden was a vigorous Bay bush and I used to crush its leaves in my hands to enjoy the aroma. When I went back to the Hind's Head once on a rare visit, I noticed a sizeable tree, a Bay Tree, in just the same place
- Rendering – The front of the Hind's Head was completely rendered when we arrived, but it was removed from the building shortly afterwards, save for the front gable
- Some Royal Engineers once built a Bailey Bridge across the river adjacent to the Old Mill as an Exercise – one of the men fell in and came to the Pub dripping wet to get a restorative drink, for which he paid with a very soggy pound note (Dad told me the story)
- Youth Club – started-up in the cold Village Hall. Table tennis with a punctured ball and seemingly only one tune on the record player, 'Wheels Cha Cha'. I was too young for this and didn't like it, it wasn't very successful
- In the severe Winter of 1963 Pigeons were amongst the major casualties. The poor birds could find little food and could barely fly, they flopped on the ground until they froze, our garden was full of them