



MELFORD MEMORIES

Ron Bowman [2023]

My name is Ronald Henry Bowman. I was born in Mile End Hospital, which is now known as The Royal London in June 1936. Then I lived with my parents at 26 Edwards Road. Here many of my relatives also lived. In 1940 during the September bombings, we were all staying down the Mile End under ground Station. Our house along with many others were completely destroyed, however my dad managed to save a small amount of furniture putting it in the Jewish Tabernacle for safe keeping, but three nights later this also was destroyed and not rebuilt until 1955. Dad participated in the search and rescue, the government rehoused us in a shared house, 16 Gawthorne Road, in Bow, but within one week this was also destroyed. Both my mum and dad's families then decided to evacuate as my Uncle Vals cousin owned one house and two bungalows in the middle of Thundersley woods which was about six miles from Southend on Sea. Here there were approximately sixty of us living after the main blitz. As dad did not have anywhere to live, he rented a new bungalow in Thundersley. At the age of five I started school at Dark Lane School, staying here till I was the age of thirteen. We went back to London for a short time whilst I helped my grandparents and other uncles on my mother's side who were all market traders, here I would pull out the trolleys for them. One of my uncles used to run a building business where my father was employed which was started by my Gt. Grandfather, as was the norm in those days, it was passed to the oldest son in the family.

From here I went to King Johns Secondary School, this was still being built so I went into the third year, leaving here in 1951. Being the age of sixteen I left school and went to work for a small builder named W.C. French at Shell Haven and Corytown. From here I was called up and did my National Service for eighteen months in Malaya fighting the Malayan Communists. I was DE mobbed in 1956 and started back with the building industry and W. C. French who were working around Basildon and Thundersley in Essex.

In 1958 I met my wife June, getting married in 1961 with my son being born in 1964. Working in Gt. Cornard on the C.L.C. Site and travelling back and forth we decided to sell up and move to where I am today in Swanfield, Long Melford in 1965. I worked on Cornard and Sudbury sites till 1969 when asked to take over a gang in Witham where I worked for a year then being asked to take on another gang in Haverhill where I worked till 1972. From here I was requested to go North to work on a new motorway. After taking redundancy I went on to work at Lucas CAV (Sudbury) as a machine tool setter and was involved with the Union as Deputy Federation Steward.

In 1968 Long Melford decided to form a Community Council. This was the start of the Big Night Out Firework Display. The first one was held on Roman Way, then the children's playground on Cordell Place. Then we went on to purchase Stoneylands where the Cricket Club play. The Community Council then went on to purchase the Dining Room Shed from the G.L.C., the Scouts got the old stores shed. I was on the Committee, so June and I collected the Village Lottery in 1983. I stood for the Parish Council as a Labor Candidate; I was elected with 309 votes, being the third highest. Eight labor councilors were elected that year, and within a few weeks the Chairman asked me if I would take on the task of Chairman of Lighting and Footpaths up until I resigned. Every year I would meet the County Surveyors and plan the footpath replacement required and replace ten lamp standards, plus have them numbered.

The Old School came on the market, and the County wanted to sell it off, I was part of the team of four being Ken Overman, Otto Scheir, Jill Philips, and myself. We all decided to take a risk and buy it for the Village but were told that we were buying a white elephant, however a lot of people had faith in us including the youth of the village who put on a forty-eight-hour pool competition in the Cock and Bell Public House. The teams were made up of (Trevor Warron and Tim Yoe Conservative, Robert Hagger, and Richard Kemp) and my son (Colin Bowman and Steve Billcliff), All together we raised over £400. As it turned out we eventually paid £54,000 for the school and the two houses and the two houses were later re-sold for £51,000, which was paid for the school within one year.

In 1990 I became the Chairman of the Community Association, we had to change from Community Council to an Association as we owned properties 'Stoneylands and the Old School.' In 1992, I organized a cheese and wine to celebrate 25years. This was held over Saturday and Sunday with 90 Long Melford organizations participating and former members. 180 invitations were sent out to previous members and guests. We had over one hundred people turn up for the occasion. In the year 1995 I also organized a 50th celebration of the end of World War Two again with local organizations supporting this. Apart from these, there was a celebration for the Queen's Golden Wedding giving away ice creams and drinks for the children along with teas and cakes for the adults. A contribution bucket was passed around which gathered treble the initial outlay. My wife and I also ran the Table Sales which started after the purchase of the school. Over £25,000 was raised before I resigned as Chairman in 2003. Whilst Chairman of the Council Association, Bush, Boake, Allen contacted me as the works was closing asking if they could put a Mill Stone in front of the Old School, this was agreed to.

I have been involved with various charities for over twenty years including Home Start as well as twenty-five years with St. Nicholas Hospice.

My daughter lives in Long Melford, as well as my oldest granddaughter moving here very recently. My son and daughter-in-law live not far away at Great Cornard as well as my granddaughter with three great grandchildren. In Sudbury I have a grandson with his partner and two great grandchildren. The rest of my family are spread over South Essex and further afield.

I close with the person I most look up to in life being the late Otto Schrier mentioned above. He was the best Treasurer for the Community Association. He started the Long Melford Open Gardens and was supportive in all the things we did.