*Typist’s Note: The interviewer’s comments have been underlined for ease of reading*

**Mill Street Memories – Frank Voss by Allan Bailey**

How and when did your family come to the area?

Well, my father’s family go back probably 200-250 years. My mother came from Bridport, my father was born in no.8 Pound Lane in 1910 and it was quite a big family, the Voss’s but as happened quite a lot my father was illegitimate so he kept his mother’s name of Voss, they didn’t know who the father was. They moved into Holloway Road, I think there was a big house there; about 12 kids grew up in there. He went to school, like we all did to Fordington and then to Grey School Passage and then thrown out at 14 and had to go out and find his own living which he went gardening for Major Markham and then he joined the army as soon as he could and that was his life up until after the war.

Just before the war, he met my other when he was down Bridport on army business, she came from Bridport and she came to Dorchester then to live. During the war, she followed him around; he was a gunnery instructor in Topsham in Exeter, just outside. He was an RSM but he had to come out after the war as he had perforated ear drums and that’s not good being a gunner.

He came back to Dorchester and managed to get a little house at the bottom of Holloway Road, 2 up 2 down, no bathroom – outside toilet. I born by then, sorry, I’m jumping on a bit. I was born in 1945 at my gran’s house in Bridport because my mother went there because the men were busy at the end of the war sort of thing.

We came back to Dorchester in 1946 back to there. We stayed and I went to Fordington High, Mill Street Mission. In 1955, we moved from there around to Kings Road where I stayed until I got married in 1964.

We did live there at the bottom of Holloway Road, no.40 Holloway Road and moved to no.20 Kings Road.

Just opposite the actual Mill.

The gates which are there now, there was always a letter box and we lived at the second one up, Mrs Carol Lake on the end, us second one, the Carts and the Terns, we can go on and on.

So you were born in 45?

45. Yes, right at the end of the War, I missed that, I remember the rationing though because that didn’t come off until 1953 ish.

And you missed conscription?

Yes, by a few years. I got friends who are 4 or 5 years older than me and they missed it so I missed it fairly good. My father was an army man so I wanted to go in, I wasn’t going to volunteer, put it that way. I wouldn’t have minded. The people who lived in Mill Street, 10 years older than me, we all seen that saw it all go away didn’t we?

Indeed.

It was all cut back. My brother who is 11 years older than me did his national service in Christchurch, the other side of Bournemouth. You had Tiddler Dayman, the same age, we all know Tiddler, he went to Hong Kong, Korea, Germany, the people you never expected to go anywhere – did.

What were the school’s like then.

I didn’t like Fordington, the first year was alright, I remember Mrs King, she made us all lie down after dinner and have a sleep. I didn’t like warm milk, when they used to warm the milk up, I hated warm milk, freezing cold I could drink a pint easily, warm milk I hated. If it had coffee in but we didn’t have coffee then.

The middle teacher Miss Pelmer, I hated her. Absolutely hated her. Mrs Parsons, I think she was trained in Nazi Germany to be a teacher. And I hated them. It was just a short walk over the hill.

Big playground that was all I remember.

We just wanted to get out as quickly as we could to play with our mates. They didn’t really teach us anything or not me anyway and I know a few other people who learned less than that.

I think at the infant school, it was just getting you used to being with people that’s all.

Yes, it didn’t do anything for me. I looked forward to going to Boys School because we had a uniform but after the first 6 months, you didn’t want to wear the uniform.

I think you might have been a bit behind me but we used to have some kids had leather boots, only ankle boots and I always wanted a pair of them and I kept on and on and on till my old man bought me a pair and I made him put metal studs in the bottom of them so we could clip clop.

Tappers.

Instead of having rubber soles, we had metal and we used to slide. The teachers up there, Mr Tweller at Colliton Street Boys School, he was nice but he left after my first proper year. Then we had a Mr Kersey but he was a bit stricter. Mr Tweller went to the new school which is down Damers Road. We had a Mr Westlake, Mr House and a Miss Minterne, she used to do the music and I always remember... I said I would always remember and now her name’s gone - the cook.

It’s the first time, I used to like my mum’s cooking, I used to walk home and have my dinner but if it was pouring with rain, you used to get wet so I talked her into giving me the 2 and 6 a day for a meal and it was alright apart they used to make you eat the things you didn’t really like. So I picked when I wanted to stay.

Apart from that, before I got there, it was still the Sunday school and the Sunday school was the only one which gave us a holiday if you like and that was only one day. My holiday when I was growing up was probably a weekend with my mum’s family at Bridport, when I say the weekend; everybody worked Saturday dinnertime, so I’m talking the Saturday dinnertime about catching the bus and coming back Sunday night. It was either there or my Father’s mother who lived in Corfe Castle then, the train down to Wareham and the other one back to Corfe Castle and that was it. The Mill Street gave us that one day in Weymouth, brilliant, everybody loved it, we went to the same place every year, Alexandra Gardens for our tea. I loved it.

Holidays were always with family.

When we were at Boy’s School, you had this Carey Camp came in, I think it was the last year I was there. It was an odd week, you went on Monday morning and came back on Friday afternoon, it was intense in Wareham, away from your mother for the first time, that was when none of us combed our hair, they made us have a wash. We never combed our hair; our mother’s always did it for us.

Then, we went from there to the Dorchester Modern School

Can we go back to Colliton Street a second, that’s really important, that school. Was Strickland there when you were there?

Yes, I’ve got some photographs, I’d forgotten Strickland, I didn’t like him very much.

Did you think you were getting a fair crack at the whip at the school?

No, because we was all in, you took your 11+ at the end there and I think, there was no doubt that the Gould’s were going to Grammar School, whether they were the thickest person in that school, they were going to Grammar school – you could have been the brightest. No that is wrong, the brightest may have got in. If you had more sense than the Gould’s and you come from Mill Street you didn’t go to Hardye’s.

I think we were discriminated against. I don’t know if that was in a nasty way or whether they were just trying to say, you know that your parents can’t afford to send you to that school.

I’m not getting at the Gould’s, it’s not the boy’s fault that their parents had money; they were going to Hardye’s whichever way it was.

There were quite a few boy of your sort of age that went to Hardye’s.

Oh yes, we had David Hallett, who I lived next door when we moved round to Kings Road – he went. Ray McCorkie went, as we know he went on to become a teacher.

I think the ordinary day to day boys and girls they were sort of excluded from it.

Yes, I know people who didn’t go and went to Dorchester Modern, went in the services and ended up as a chief technician on the trains, even somebody like me, I went into building and when I retired I had more certificates than I wanted, I got my site manager bit , I was a health and safety inspector, an asbestos inspector, you know, I think as my life went on school changed, they didn’t treat you as kids, as you got older and went into education, 16, 17+ the teachers are treating you like adults and you learn more.

What happened in Dorchester in the late 50’s early 60’s I think was Winfrith and they had all these people coming in from Winfrith, clever scientists and technicians and they took over the places from people that would previously have gone there that’s what I think.

We could never prove it, there was always talk that if you were in with Mr Hamilton, I think the name of Headmaster of Hardye’s was, if you had a quiet word with him you were in. You can’t prove it but that was the story all around the town.

Let’s face it they weren’t interested in the boys with their asses hanging out of their trousers. It didn’t matter really as we had such a good education at the Modern school.

I’m not knocking Modern School; there were some teachers that I didn’t like and some that I really did like. I didn’t like Mr Griffin very much, the music teacher. Mr Jones was a good teacher – bit strict. Mr Dawes was alright.

Bonfield should never have been allowed to teach children. He wouldn’t get a job in school now, he taught woodwork and not very good at that.

He just used to like to hit people I’m afraid.

He put me off of woodwork.

We had some nice teachers – David Downton, really nice chap.

His brother was at Colliton Street when I was there – his younger brother Adrian Downton.

He went to grammar school and went on to become a teacher. We had some good teachers and some bad ones.

At least we had some facilities there. Colliton Street was just disgraceful; it was a slum school wasn’t it with open air toilets

Yes, it was the best thing when it was shut down.

It should have been shut down 50 years before it was.

Like you said Modern school it was nice up there for people moving around.

It was airy wasn’t it?

Yes, completely different. You weren’t stuck with one teacher, how can one teacher teach you everything anyway. How can he teach maths and then English, art and geography, there’s no way. Up there you went to Mrs so and so for English, somebody else for history and they was all good.

And of course there were girls there.

Well yes, that made a little bit of difference. I’ve got grandchildren now, two of them are 18, they’re not interested in girls at the minutes, its sports still.

When I left there, I went to Weymouth technical college for a year, full time.

What, Building?

At Newstead Road, it’s a bit complicated because my birthday is September the 12th and I only done 3 years at Modern School, Tony Brown who was in our year is 4 days older than me and he called us in and said you too can leave at the end of this year because your birthday is before we come back. Well great, Tony Brown went to work and my father went and got me a job on Ricardo’s but Ricardo’s said it was better if you go to Weymouth for a year, he wasn’t paying me mind but I ended up staying on the same amount of time but the last year was down Weymouth but it was a step up from Modern school. We did all the trades at that time still maths and English down there as well, it was a step up again, they were treating you as an older person again, don’t forget I was only 15. In 4 years you went from being treated like a little boy at Colliton Street to down there being treated as a man.

By the time I left I was old enough to join the services, you are a man in there, there was no such thing as boys in there at that time.

So, you went back to Ricardo’s when you’d finished there.

Yes, when I left there I went on Ricardo’s on Fordington Green.

Did you have an apprenticeship there?

Yes, a five year apprenticeship then by the way, not the two year stuff now they’re throwing out -five years.

Ricardo’s were a big firm weren’t they, were they the biggest?

I would say they were the biggest in Dorchester, the Cakes were very close, you had Angels, were smaller, Ricardo’s probably had 16-17 people there.

What were you working on at that time, what houses were being built?

My first job was actually down Universal Engineering, my very first day down Chickerell, which was an extension to a factory. The first house, Ricardo’s were just about finishing at West Stafford at that time but I didn’t go out there, you know West Stafford, you turn right just opposite the church.

Godwin Close

Up round there is some bungalows and houses; Ricardo’s built some out there. They also done Came View but before my time. We did some big houses; we did York House in Prince of Wales Road.

My gang, the gang I was on built the big house. I built this bulls eye, I was an apprentice, I built this bulls eye arch whilst the rest of the gang built the house, because I had to cut all the bricks, it’s still there.

It might have been a bit later than that, we did Merchants garage in town which is now knocked down and gone flat.

I was on Ricardo’s when we knocked the last few houses down at Mill Street, the ones at the top before you went into Mill Back where you used to live. Ricardo’s knocked those down. The rest down the bottom by the chapel was gone, the flats were being built. At the top, Ricardo’s, one of the foreman on Ricardo’s built two pairs of houses and one single one at the time, Charlie Mills lived in one of the semi detached one and Mrs Blackwell lived in the detached one which is now a semi detached one.

It was ridiculous what they did to that house.

Obviously, he wasn’t going to stay there. I was there then. That’s where we found, probably in the last three houses where you lived, we found an old rusty machine gun - germ and we buried that under the patio of your house in Prince of Wales Road, all the wood was rotted away but it was the metal frame, I don’t think it would ever be able to be fired again. We found a German helmet there which ended up at the Dorchester museum not the military because it wasn’t there.

We found that in one of the out houses, you know they come back from the war and brought these things back.

It’s an asset to us I think that all the people who lived down there, they were dirt poor, didn’t have anything, they all joined up in the First World War, they all went.

I’m just going into the First World War bit now but the Dorchester people who volunteered and died, some of my family, brilliant book, that’s a bit before my time, that’s another story.

What book is that Frank?

It’s called Dorchester Remembers the Great War

That’s by Brian Bates

So when you were growing up, a lot of the soldiers were coming back from the Second World War

Well, I was too young to notice, I was born right at the end. I can remember people going off to do their national service. I remember my brother going away, my brother was an apprentice as well on Ricardo’s, with a few others, Cheddar Cheeseman, that’s John and Teddy Brewer, they was all apprentices, so their national service was deferred until they finished their apprenticeship, but they had to go to night classes with the TA at the weekends. Then they had to go in. You didn’t stop your apprenticeship, go in and then come out and carry on; you finished your apprenticeship first. I remember my brother going away to weekend camps with Cheddar and all them and coming back with bars of chocolate because they could get chocolate before it came off rationing here. I remember that bit.

I remember when he finally got his call up papers and they all went off up to the station to catch their trains, I know that some went in the Navy, some in the Army; my brother went in the Air Force.

Where did he train to?

I haven’t got a clue, the one where all the air force people go to, I can’t remember the name.

When he got his posting, it was to Christchurch, RAF Saltley, which if you drive past it, they still have the flag pole. I’ve been through there a few times. Some of the buildings there, It’s just up for sale I think.

You remember the great big things they had down Ringstead, my brother was in radar which they had some up there as well, he was one of the plotters there.

So when you were growing up in the late 40’s then, everybody would have been in the war, what physical things were left from the war, there were all the old air raid shelters but were the dumps still up on Came Woods, did you investigate Came Woods?

I’ve been up Came Woods, I’ve been down in the bunkers, full up with women’s underwear they was. I remember that, I wasn’t interested in the women’s underwear but there were loads down there. I remember the platforms up in the trees, there were some of them at Kingston Maurward, it’s not like it is now but there were a few up in the trees there, we could sneak through there without anyone seeing us at one time.

Have you ever been down the bunkers at Came Woods?

Yes

It might take an hour but I expect I could find them if they’re still there, they had a trap door and you go down. The iron beds were still there where they pulled them off the wall, no mattresses just the springs but loads of women’s underwear down there, old fashioned underwear if you like, yes I can remember that.

The army side of it, I can remember Poundbury Road where they had the boon come down across the road with the sentry box. Can you remember that, just before the railway bridge, the barracks are here, the TA centre there? Before you go over the bridge, there was a sentry box there with a boon that came down and you stopped and they asked you blah, blah, blah, no you aren’t coming down this way, yes you are and you go on. Same going on down the Grove, there’s another one there.

Because, I mean the Barracks in those days extended all the way down, right the way across Poundbury didn’t it. There were huts all the way across those houses.

All where those caravans are now, there were mostly tents there; I remember they had a miniature assault course down there with a swinging bridge and tunnels, where Travis Perkins is now. After they all moved out, the kids moved in didn’t we. We had a pleasure of smashing panes of glass like when everybody moved out of Mill Street, there weren’t many panes of glass left.

Worse thing is, it’s a crime really. Remember those Dorset clay pots you used to get, the dark and light brown things, worth a bit of money now, I’ve got a few actually the ones which were 6 inches high, probably worth £10 now but when Mill Street moved out, we put them up on the wall and took it turns to throw stones at them to break them, that’s what we used to do.

When they were all pulled down, I remember that some of the boys your sort of age, bigger boys than us, they went through and got all the lead and everything out of it.

A bit older than me, it wasn’t me, because I was stupid, I didn’t realise how it was worth otherwise I would have joined in, but I didn’t, I can honestly say. What I can remember is I lived in Kings Road then, we had a little back garden then, when I say a little back garden probably 30ft long by 10-15ft wide, it wasn’t a lawn I can tell you that, it was vegetables there for my old man, nobody had lawns, that was valuable, you couldn’t eat grass but you could eat.... and I had a pet rabbit at the bottom where we used to feed them all the greens but when they pulled the houses down, I went down there one day and it was dead and ripped to pieces where the rats came out of Mill Street, they were looking for anything weren’t they, because it was pretty rat infested.

I must admit, I can’t remember that. I can remember laying in bed at night, I shared a room with my sister when we were round there and you could hear what we were told were mice in the walls, you know scuttling about, because the walls were plaster and lathe.

The old bridge which we always called Swan Bridge because it was next to the Swan pub, we know it’s called Princes Bridge to give it its proper name, the hours we spent on there, especially when the sun was going down and you could hear ‘plop’, it was the water fowls, which is a water rat, you could see them plop in the water and swim across, we used to try and hit them with anything.

There was hundreds of them, every house had mouse traps and stuff like that didn’t they, everyone of us.

I can’t really think how people managed, we’re so used to having fridges but milk in the summer just wouldn’t keep at all would it? Meat wouldn’t keep, nothing would keep.

Well you never ever bought more than you would need really.

No, that’s right there were shops everywhere.

Nowadays, you can go into Tesco, you can buy 5 pints and you put it in the fridge and you finish it off if you have a big family in 7 days time but we had a pint of milk and it was put in a cold bowl of water to try and keep it cool because I used to hate milk that had gone off, I hate it.

I could drink cold milk but I didn’t like warm milk at all, apart from that I think us boys, apart from porridge, we didn’t really drink much milk, perhaps that we they give it to us at school.

I used to enjoy milk but you only had squash otherwise really didn’t you.

I could drink 6 or 7 cups of tea a day, I never then; nobody really wanted a cup of tea did they? Not kids anyway.

The grownups, didn’t really, I can’t remember, they would all have a cup of tea if someone came round or something or mid morning or mid afternoon but they didn’t drink an inordinate amount.

So what shops were still down there Frank when you were there then?

In my time, you used to have Sophie Popes – top of Holloway Road, right on the corner of Holloway Road to Pound Lane, the name of Sophie Pope, a really, really old woman, she’s probably the oldest woman I know or knew then, if you asked me her age then, I would have said she was probably 200 years old but at least 80, she sold everything from a nail to tea, oxo that type of thing. I wouldn’t say she sold chocolate though that was more Mortimore’s which was up Shorts Lane, that was the only shops, those two.

What about my great grandfather’s bakery, was that closed then?

I can’t remember.

That closed in the 50’s as far as I know but there was another bakery over in Holloway Road somewhere.

Not in my time, it was around Fordington Cross.

No, there was another baker over there somewhere supposedly.

Yes, it was at Fordington Cross then, because we used to go round Cliff, I still call it Cliff, we used to go round Cliff to Fordington Cross and then go back, I don’t think my father ever saw the crust of bread for years because we used to go round and get it whilst it was hot and moan and moan until my mother cut it off, it was no cut bread of course.

It was all fresh wasn’t it?

Yes, you didn’t feed the ducks or birds with bread because if you had any bread over it was put in to make bread pudding, not bread and butter pudding, the bread pudding. Alright, now and again you had bread and butter pudding with raisins and milk but it was always bread pudding at least once a fortnight you had a great big slab of bread pudding. You didn’t throw much away.

There was also of course, Forrester’s in High.....

Yes, we didn’t go in there very much, or my mother didn’t, we didn’t really go in Sophie Pope’s, it was either Mortimore’s once a week, might go in twice a week up the town, we never bought vegetables and that’s because my father had two allotments, one up Max Gate and one down St Georges Road so we grew everything ourselves and as Dave Forrester said, we used to pickle everything and put it in jars, salt things down, which was the cabbage and stuff like that , that was always pickled, no salted wasn’t it but you pickled the onions, you pickled some cabbage, red cabbage especially.

Yes, make piccalilli and all those sorts of things; everything went in the sun then didn’t it. Yes, I remember rows and rows of glass jars, you know with those special tops on them, special air tight tops and rows and rows and rows of those, full of, as you say everything, everything you can imagine, apples, pears...

The end of the harvest, shall we say, you sat down, probably end of September like and you had all your shallots and you sat round for a whole night, peeling and putting them in jars with those little black balls, I never knew what they did but they always put them little preservative black balls, can’t remember what they were called. We weren’t allowed to touch those pickled onions until Christmas – which is better than what you can buy, I can tell you.

So when we were kids then Frank, where did you play to with your boys, your mates? Was Fordington Fields err Kings Road open then?

Kings Road playing fields, they started filling that in in the early 50’s.

Because before that it had just been swamp.

Yes

Because it was between the two rivers.

It used to be a water meadow and the water was, I would say, probably at deepest only about 2ft. We used to bend the reeds down and make little walkways through there but um, I can remember when they started filling it in, early 50’s I would say, when I say early 50’s, probably 52 because by 55 it was getting on pretty well filled in and grass down by then.

Yes, when I first knew it, it was complete then and that was about 55, 56, 57.

Yes, I can remember when they built the shelter, roughly about then, I haven’t been down there lately to see the date on it, I remember the day when the steam roller was delivered.

I remember that, yes.

Just remember me now, you said other shops, well it wasn’t a shop but it was a factory, the sweet factory, they used to make boiled sweets, I always remember if they smashed a jar, they couldn’t sell it because it had glass and that, we used to hook the sweets out, make sure there was no glass on them.

Those poor girls in the summer, they were so hot in there and there were wasps everywhere.

Well that sugar used to bring those wasps from miles around.

I remember coming outside and having a fag and just sweating because they were boiling up sugar all day, all the time.

And that galvanised fence, probably 6ft high perhaps.

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