

ROY COOK – Chimney Sweep, Shrimper, Fish & Chip retailer, etc.

Born in 1884

He went to sea for 13 years as a young lad. His first trip was into Margate Harbour on the “Invicta”. He later became a shrimper.

Ada, his daughter, was born in 1914 and recalls that when she was 14, in 1928, her father had tearooms at the top of Brooks End Hill.

His father lived along the Canterbury Road in the right hand one of the pair in the hollow, where the lime kiln once stood – now No: 296 Canterbury Road.

There is a lovely photo of Roy Cook’s father with his grandson Peter in the basket he took with him when he went to Minnis Bay to go shrimping.

After Roy left the sea, he went to work on London’s Underground system as railway policeman. He was one of the first of these people to wear a uniform.

In 1912, Ada recalls being told that her father, Roy Cook, had a fried fish shop just behind the Queen’s Head in Park Lane. Her elder brother died there in 1912.

For many years he was the local chimney sweep, both in Birchington and in Buckingham Road, Margate. While he was in Birchington, he lived in the old house, which stood on the site of the present Natwest Bank. Ada remembers it being known as Bath Cottage (as opposed to “Bath Cottages” next door). Ada says it was still standing in 1928 when she was 14, as she recalls that it was here that she first met her husband, whom she married when she was 18 in 1932.

During his early years at Birchington, he used to own two donkeys, which were taken down to the sands during the summer months, to provide the children with rides. In the wintertime, they were housed in the backyard behind his home in Station Road.

In the Kelly’s Directory for 1930, he is shown as the Chimney Sweep at this address, and also the fried fish shop next door in the other half of the house. He did his job as Chimney Sweep during the day and often got called to act as the “good luck” charm at weddings and special anniversaries. He used to keep the bags of soot in the sheds at the back of Bath Cottage, to be sold to local gardeners for their allotments and gardens. During the daytime, his wife would get all the fish and potatoes ready for the evening. This was in addition to bringing up six children. When Roy came home from his chimney sweeping, he would have a good scrub and then open up the fried fish shop. In his “spare” time he continued his shrimping. He also kept two boats for a number of years.

By 1932, his house had been demolished to make way for the new Natwest Bank, which had moved over from premises just across the other side of Station

Road. When he left Birchington at this point, he went to run a pub in Ash – the Wheatsheaf in Cop Street, a “Gardner’s of Ash Ales” pub.

A slackening off of pub trade during the depression years quite probably triggered the move to Margate, where he and his family lived for 13 years. While he was in Margate he was again sweeping chimneys and acting as the “Lucky Sweep” at weddings whenever asked.

Ada’s son Peter has a large picture of his grandfather driving a horse and carriage. The photograph shows him sitting at the front of the carriage in his top hat and wielding a whip hand was taken outside St John’s Church, Margate. He used to take visitors for rides along Margate seafront. Ada thinks (but is not certain) that the horse and carriage belonged to a Mr Brown.

He also loved dressing up as a clown for children’s parties. He used to act as entertainer at children’s parties, much to the delight of the youngsters. Some of these parties were held at the United Services Club in Station Road in Birchington. From a very young age, he learned to play the Piano Accordion very well and this, too, was used in his entertainments, particularly at the children’s entertainment hosted by the British Legion.

He was a long-time member of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffalos and Ada still has a certificate he was awarded dated 25th April 1925. Before W.W. 2 he broadcast on T.V., in its pioneering days.

Ada married her husband in 1932 and his cousin was Fred Castle, who used to keep a horse and cart until the day he died.