

EDNA HARWOOD (née Boucher)

42 Grenham Bay Avenue
Birchington CT7 9NW
843 533

Edna, who was an only child, was born at her parents' home at Mill Row in 1937. Her parents and grandparents all originated from Wales. Her father, known as Fred or Taff Boucher (born in 1893), left school at 13 years old and went down the local pit. He was going out with a young girl called Elsie Jones (born in 1900) in his village and their romance was serious, but they weren't engaged at this stage. Then the mine closed in about 1926 and Fred had to find work elsewhere. He heard that there was plenty of work in the Ramsgate area, and they were planning to build a Channel Tunnel during the early 1930s, so he set off by train from Wales on his own.

The journey was long and tedious and when he got to Herne Bay he made a momentous decision - "I don't care what it's like - I'm getting out at the next station - I've had enough of this." So when he arrived at Birchington, he climbed out of the train and walked over the bridge to Fasham's café in Station Approach for a mug of tea *and a bun*. What he asked for was "Tea, please", which in his home village would have produced tea *and a bun*, but not so in Birchington. He was brought his tea and then sat waiting for his bun - which of course did not arrive. When he asked where it was, he was told he hadn't asked for it - so he decided to abandon his bun and go and see what the village had to offer.

He was able to find lodging in the village and get a job on the railway, working as a porter on Birchington Station and later on line-maintenance between Birchington and Reculver.

Elsie also came to Birchington later in 1926 and found lodgings and work. She and Fred married at All Saints Church in 1927. They eventually bought a house in Mill Row and Edna was born there in 1937. They stayed in Birchington, moving out to "Railway Cottage" until Edna was about 18 months old. The cottage had been occupied by the Tatham family previously (see under STATION), and it stood right beside the track between Birchington and Reculver. Because of Fred's job, they were able to rent it, which was very convenient. Elsie's parents Mr & Mrs Jones came over from Wales and bought No 1 Mill Row, and lived there until Mr Jones died in 1953.

In 1940, Edna and her mother went to Wales for about 18 months, while her father remained in the cottage. The cottage had no gas or electricity and life was fairly primitive out there. Fred stayed there until just a few days before a landmine was dropped nearby in 1941, blowing out all the windows.

Fred Boucher moved into the Station House at Birchington, because the Station Master had his own house at Minnis Bay. Edna and her mother returned to Birchington and lived with her father at the Station House until March 1943. At this point Edna and her mother went to Blackpool for a while, ostensibly for a holiday. Edna was told that she had to stay in Blackpool (very unwillingly) and her mother returned home to Birchington. Edna's parents collected her from Blackpool in June 1944.

Station House had three downstairs rooms and a kitchen. Upstairs there were three bedrooms but no bathroom. Bathing was done in a tin bath in the kitchen. There was no running hot water and the toilet was out on the far side of the back yard in their walled part of the station. Their yard also contained a shed and coal-house. Across the other side of the entrance into the main station yard was a bank, on the top of which was the Station House garden. It was quite spacious and contained a vegetable plot as well as flowers, trees and a swing for Edna. They also kept chickens and rabbits on this land.

The station was a very busy place in those days, with all the local supplies coming down on goods' trains every day. Carter Patterson vehicles, the large freight firm, were frequent callers at the yard preceding and during the war. The churns of milk were lined up outside the Station House wall, ready to be taken into the station and sent off by train. Coal lorries were constantly coming down to the yard and all the local shops and businesses had their parcels of goods delivered to the station. The only form of heating in Station House was from coal fires - as was the case in almost every other house in the village at this time.

The signal box stood at the western end of the down-side platform, up on the bank. Fred would sometimes take Edna up there out of harm's way while an air-raid was on during the war. He was also in the Home Guard throughout the war. Edna recalls that there was a rifle which was kept at the station 'for emergency use', which she thinks was kept in the porters' office. There were two or three porters on duty at any one time, as well as the Station Master and two ladies who ran the ticket office - one of whom was Mrs Lewis.

On one occasion while they were living at the station, Edna's mother managed to lock herself out of the house. With the help of one of the porters, a ladder was placed up against an open bedroom window and a very unwilling and nervous Edna had to climb up and get inside to unlock the door. On another occasion during an air raid, Edna had wanted to go to the toilet so her father went out into the yard with her. While she was there, a German plane opened fire over the village and the two of them had to take shelter in the toilet until the shrapnel stopped cascading down on them all, before they dared make the dash back into the house. Whenever they had to go out to the shelters, mother was always the last out and she would make sure she had the little brief case which was kept under the hall stand. It held all the important family papers, like birth certificates, ration books and identity cards etc.

During the war, Edna's parents got to know Derek Hart's family very well and Edna knew both Derek and Owen as well as Pam, their sister. At the end of the war there were celebrations all over the village, including a large bonfire up in the Square soon after V.E. Day. There was then a second bonfire up there on V.J Day as well.

Edna and her parents finally left Station House in about 1946-7, when the new Station Master needed the house. Elsie Boucher heard of an elderly lady who lived at No 9 Minnis Road (the top one of the three flat-roofed houses). The lady offered them accommodation in exchange for the help she needed. She also promised to leave them her house when she died. They moved from Station House to the old lady's home on the one day, but the old lady sadly died the following day. They stayed on there in her house while the lady's estate was being sorted out. By then they were able to put down a deposit on 48 (later re-numbered '52') Cross Road. Around this time, Edna's grandparents went over to the United States and Canada for a time, but eventually came back to Birchington in about 1949.

Edna began working at Courts the Chemist's shop when she left school. She soon met Cecil Harwood and married him in 1955, aged only 17. It was a very happy marriage and the arrival of Dale and Gareth added to their joy. They lived over in Margate initially. Edna's father Fred died in 1967 and her mother and grandmother came over to Margate to live with Edna and Cecil. Edna's mother Elsie died in 1996. In her latter years she lived in the top flat of 28 King's Avenue, Minnis Bay.

Cecil and Edna would have celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary this year but, sadly, Cecil died last year.

Based on an interview with Edna Harwood in July 2005

Jennie Burgess - Parish Archivist