

## My Family - LAURIE BROOKS

Comments in square bracket [ ] are by Jennie Burgess

I was born May 10<sup>th</sup> 1932 at "Grenham Villa", 60 Station Road. Grenham Villa was demolished in the late 1960s and is now part of the parade of shops [roughly where Birchington Fabrics now stands].

Christened at St Benedict's (Catholic) Church, Minnis Road, given the names Lawrence Charles.

**Father** - Charles Herbert Brooks

**Mother** - Christine Maude Brooks (née Bennett)

**Paternal Grandfather** - John Charles Brooks (born at "Admiral Harvey" Hotel, Ramsgate.

" **Grandmother** - Kate Louisa Brooks (née Hedge)

**Maternal Grandfather** - Charles Bennett

" **Grandmother** - Maude Bennett (née Davies)

**Sisters - Elizabeth Anne** } twins born December 28<sup>th</sup> 1936

- **Diana Mary** } at Margate Hospital

**Great Grandfather** Hedge was a Coastguard base at Epple Bay Station (ex A.B. in the Royal Navy) and drowned off the coast in 1874, when the Coastguard Cutter he was sailing capsized. His grave and headstone are in All Saints churchyard.

## Reminiscences of Birchington

by Laurie Brooks

I was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 1932 at No: 60 Station Road, where my parents (who were married at Christmas 1930) had a flat. But the first house I remember was 9 Prospect Road. I can remember its number being changed for some reason from 7 to 9 in about 1936, I would think.

On the corner of Prospect and Station Roads was the Sea View Hotel, and opposite, Willett's Dairy on the other corner. Watson's Coal Yard was a few yards along the road towards the Sea View [on the other side of his old house 60 Station Road]. Opposite our front door was the rear of Walker's Garage, which ran through to its frontage on Minnis Bay Road. In the other direction from our front door was the unmade-up Westfield Road. This road, where we later moved to No. 1 in 1938, was made-up by the contractors Robert Brett & Sons in the same year, as well as Eastfield Road. At the bottom of Prospect Road was an open field, but the made-up pavement round its perimeter indicated that it was earmarked for development as part of the "Garden Estate". The bigger field on the left was also already fenced, although down to hay until it was ploughed up during WW 2 to aid food production. I remember the smaller field producing potatoes during the war, as I helped with "potato-picking" (gathering).

During the war, after Dunkirk, army vehicles were parked under the trees on Dog Acre at the end of Alpha Road, and a large reservoir (E.W.S. - "Emergency Water Supply") was built behind the houses on the south side of Alpha Road. Dog Acre was a little bigger in those days as it had not been encroached upon by the large building which now stands on the south side of it. This open space was just fairly wild, where we played and climbed the trees and hid in the bushes. No surfaced path or municipal seats in those days!

The Square was regularly churned up by the Churchill tanks that rumbled through it in the war years. They were mostly parked under the trees in Westgate Bay Avenue in Westgate - until D-Day, that is. Bren-gun carriers also contributed to the road disturbance, as their tracks slewed round on the tarmac surface. Minnis Bay Road was open on the left, covered with allotments down as far as Gordon Square. I believe the land was owned by the Church Commissioners [it was, in fact, Church land]. On the right hand side, a small shop frontage was occupied by Mr Millen, who was a St Dunstan's-trained basket weaver, having been blinded in the First World War. His sons Peter and Raymond were both friends of mine and I used to go there and play with them regularly in the open plot to the right of the shop, whilst their father laboured in his workshop.

About three houses down from the corner on the right hand side of Minnis Road [now No. 8] was the house occupied by the Ward sisters, who were recluses. When their mother died, they kept her death a secret for quite a time afterwards. This caused a considerable stir in the village when the whole thing came to light. I think this was about 1937 or 1938. [It was the latter date. There is more information on this in the Museum archives].

Until about this year there were still independent buses operating. I remember Walker's Garage had a rather shaky green, open-top double-decker that ran to Margate. But East Kent bought them out in the late 1930s. I do remember the stir that was caused by Birchington becoming part of the Borough of Margate in (I think) 1936 or 37 [it was 1935]. I also remember the moving of the fountain in the Square to one side [outside the

Queen's Head] to make the flow of traffic easier. Probably a good thing, as I am sure the aforementioned tanks would have demolished it a few years later, had it not been repositioned.

My Great-Uncle Jack, my father's uncle, brother of my grandma Kate Brooks (née Hedge), lived at No 6 Alpha Road with his wife Kate (Aunt Kate) and their son Raymond and daughter Katie. Katie was a musician and had her own trio (or Quartet?) who played at the Beresford Hotel and at Bobby's Restaurant in Northdown Road, Cliftonville. She had her own motor car and drove from engagement to engagement in it - very unusual in those days. She was in ENSA ["Entertainments National Service Association" - the entertainment arm of the Services, to encourage the troops] during WW 2. Her brother was a sergeant pilot in the war and was sadly killed ("missing during night operations over Italy") in the last few days of the war. His memorial plaque is in Birchington (All Saints) Churchyard at the front of the family grave.

But some years before the war, I inherited his Hornby Railway. Sadly, also, I don't remember him, as I was too young by the time he became a grown-up. But Katie I visited regularly at "Highfield House", a care-home in Alpha Road, until she died.

My Great-grandfather, whose grave is in the churchyard, was Coastguard who was drowned off Epple Bay in 1874, leaving a large family, including Jack and my Grandma Kate and they were all sent to an orphanage in Hampstead, London. One of the girls married a man from Ramsgate and they emigrated to San Francisco. I think they arrived there a year or so before the earthquake and fire of 1905, but I was told by my descendant cousin, Betti-Jean that they were lucky, as the fire stopped "two blocks" from where they lived! I visited her and other family descendants in 1981 in San Francisco.

### **Boy on a Tricycle:**

My first recollections of my local environment were gathered while pedalling my "Lines' Brothers" tricycle up and down Prospect Road as far as the Sea View and into the unmade Westfield Road, then along the cart track that led from the corner bungalow [now with a second floor added] at the bottom of Prospect Road, across to the Church House in Canterbury Road. Mr and Mrs Mayo had the coal yard behind their house [at 49 Prospect Road] and they used, quite regularly, to take their horse and four wheeled cart out along the track (now Kent Gardens?) I think they also must have owned the big field in the corner on which stood a horse-drawn hay rake, a two-wheeled implement with shafts for a horse, and equipped with large, curved, pointed tines at the rear.

The field is now built over, as is the area on the east side of the cart track, where we used to play on the "chalks". These were heaps of chalk about two or three feet high, joined together, where we would run up and down the dips and peaks. Surrounding this area was just grass and weeds. My first sight and sound of the grass-hoppers was experienced here. Lying in the long grass, we would often see the source of this unusual sound. I loved seeing the grass-hoppers and hoped Mr and Mrs Mayo would come by on their cart, its wheels making tracks in the soft gravel. Sometimes I would ride my little three-wheeler down as far as "Bedlam", an old house at the very bottom of the hill. It was eventually burnt down on purpose, as practice for the local fire brigades [13<sup>th</sup> February 1939]. I was in the crowd of spectators when this event occurred.