

Sport and relaxation



When we were young, to a large extent we made our own entertainment. In the winter we played cards, table tennis and darts.

We had a three-quarter size billiard table purchased in 1940, which was extremely heavy, with a slate bed. We kept it down in the cellar when not in use, and had to carry it up when required. There were no legs for it, so it went on top of the dining table and was more or less level. When we got it there was no covering or pockets. Aunt Mary knitted the pockets out of dishcloth cotton, and we covered the slate with a chenille tablecloth, which worked quite well.

When we had parties with other children we played games like Sardines and Blind Man's Bluff. The house was ideal for hide and seek, as there were many hiding places.

Although my father had to juggle managing the farm with raising five children, he always found time to play with us; cricket and ball games outside, and other pastimes. On the beach he would let us bury him in the sand until only the top of his head was showing!



We also used to go to the beach at Winchelsea as a family, and had several happy holidays there. We always stayed in the same bungalow.

My father nearly drowned once while we were on holiday. We had to go over a dyke on a plank, but Rene wouldn't go, so my father picked her up to take her over. Unfortunately the extra weight broke the plank, sending them tumbling eight feet into the water below. My father couldn't swim, but luckily he was able to throw



Rod, my father and Ruth

Rene up the bank, and haul himself out.

At Winchelsea the sea used to come up to the garden of the bungalow that we rented. We would go out with shrimping nets and catch shrimps to eat.

Rod, Rene and I used catapults that my father made us and we became quite accurate. Apart from using pebbles as

ammunition we made lead pellets by pouring molten lead into holes drilled in wood. This meant they were all the same size and therefore more accurate. The catapults were made from hazel where two branches met to form a V. The pouch for the ammunition was made of a tongue from a leather boot cut with the rough side on the outside so as to give a grip for the fingers. There was an electric pole outside our gate with a number 24 on it in aluminium lettering. By careful aiming I managed to knock off part of the number and changed it to number 21.

Another thing Rod and I did was to get hollow keys and stuff these with tips of non-safety (paraffin) matches with a nail pushed into the end and a piece of string acting as a handle. By swinging this and clouting the end on something hard like a wall it was possible to get a good bang, which sometimes split the key.

I was also very keen on shooting, first with an air rifle, and later with a .22 rifle which I still have. There were always a lot of rabbits in Norheads and I spent many hours going round the farm shooting. I was joined by Ivor Smith, who was also rather keen. Ivor had been evacuated to Burwash but had later returned. His parents lived in The Grove, off Pole Steeple in Biggin Hill, and he still lives there.

I once shot a fox with an air rifle, which wasn't enough to do serious damage. The fox ran away rubbing his side along the ground thinking he'd been stung by something, before disappearing into the woods.

We played the usual things like cricket with friends, and continued this in the young farmers club. Rod and I played for Oxted YFC and used to carry our pads strapped on the sides of our motorbikes. One day on the way back from cricket we were coming round the corner at the bottom of Norheads Hill. I was in front and came across a girl on a bike on the wrong side of the road. I throttled down and managed to miss her. Rod was behind me and wasn't quite so lucky. He came off his bike. The girl also came off but wasn't hurt. Rod was not badly injured but he had to have a few days off work. This meant that the next day I had to go by myself on the milk round, having previously only driven the van about 100 yards. In at the deep end! This is how I taught myself to drive.



A family photo of a balloon seller, circa 1930