

Golant ramblings

At the end of the Second World War I moved with my parents to Goant – during the war years I lived with my Mum at Ponsanooth. Dad had been appointed Tug Master to the Port of Fowey, as also was his brother and later his first cousin as Pilot so it was a family affair then. Although I cannot remember it I visited Golant when just a small child – my Uncle Will had by some reason retained a 14foot rowing boat at Golant – most of the boats had had the garboard plank removed so they could not be used - by some means he had avoided that and we used to visit the Stephens family at Cliff – many years later I sold an orchard on behalf of the family and it was developed.

We moved first to my Aunts house at Tanhay Cottage and then to Johnny Mays Bungalow – the last of four bungalows overlooking what is now the village green - this property has now been demolished in 2017 and being rebuilt into what appears to be a very modern property much out of keeping to those remaining.

We had become firm friends with Mac and Elsie Boots who had built a property on the east bank of the river opposite Golant – They used our home as a port of refuge when waiting for the tide and our family helped transport materials across the river during the building – there was no access to the site at time other than a trek across fields from Hill Hay Farm at St Veep. In later years when living in such an isolated spot became too much I was able to help sell the property and purchase 3 St Sampsons Terrace for them which is still in the ownership and the family and become our first home when we married before we moved to Tywardreath.

I attended the village school until it closed in 1947 – the teacher was Mrs Francis and there were six pupils when closed – Fred Bonney, John Cawrse and myself, Winnie Lewarne, Priscilla Hawke and Florrie Allen .

There were not than many children in the village – and the age range was significant – those who lived in the outlying farms attended Tywardreath while those in the village went to Fowey on the train – I do not recall much of an upheaval when we were sent off to Fowey – we would have been with a number of other children from the village, it was just an accepted event. The trek through the town again was not seen as a problem – at least from our point of view – all a bit of an adventure and I suppose those older children did take on some responsibility for the younger ones – which of course I did when much older having to look after my little sister – did wonders for my street cred having to drag a five year old along when I was sixteen !!

In the passing of time it seems that I enjoyed an idyllic childhood – the weather was also fine – or most so, the freedom enjoyed particularly in the summer months was unrestricted within reason – with no television or any of the present day modern communication media the children made there own entertainment – in the summer particularly at weekend and through the school holidays we would spend hours way from home – the downs were a favourite place together with Golant Woods – but here as it was private we had to be a little more careful – the access to the woods was by a path which

went beyond Les and Dolly Tabb's bungalow and as it would be almost certain that one of their nephews' or niece would be with us we felt that it was not a problem.

In the winter of 1947 we had to collect our coal from Baileys store by the railways station as no vehicles were able to get into the village— now all these buildings have been demolished – I recall my Dad having to pull the sack of coal along the road with a sledge – there were other times during my childhood when we had hard winters – one year the river became quite frozen and my Dad had to tack sacrificial planks of wood on the bow of the little motor boat to prevent chaffing.

Living where I did overlooking the open space which at that time was the remnants of a rubbish dump and had in its centre a water pumping station it was a reasonable play area for football and cricket – the access route to the orchard to the north then owned by Fred Hoit and later purchased by a Mr Polkinghore from Bodmin was hard surfaced and also gave access to a caravan used by a Mr Gill who had a fish and chip shop in St Austell – he was an excellent fisherman and had a knack of catching flounders from his boat which he moored just off the boathouse and quay at what we knew as hard ground . There was always some ambiguity about usage of the quay at that time as it was I believe owned by the Parkyns who had lived at Penquite Manor - that situation seem to have resolved itself over the years. Dad went to work by boat – he had a small 14ft boat built by Curtis and Pape of Looe with a stuart turner engine and in all weathers this was his mode of transport for many years until he bought a Ford Van – naturally purchased by Phillips and Geake of St Austell – Geake having a family connection with Golant and I am sure a special deal was made to those who came from the village.

Returning to the games we played – one which engaged most of the children in the summer from time to time was “Hedi i over” - it comprised two teams chosen by the more older children and took place at the large galvanised shed which has now been replaced by the rowing club – the shed at that time was owned by Mike Digby who ran a fishing boat from Golant often used for shark fishing at that time and lived at the property which is now the Cormorant Hotel . The shed had a galvanised roof and the game consisted of throwing a ball over the roof to the opposing team on the other side – the art of course was to get the ball to bounce on the roof thus deflective it and making it more difficult to catch – the ball was thrown with the shout “Hedi i over”. If the ball was caught then the opposing team would run around each side and throw the ball the aim of which was to hit one of the opposing team and so capture them to become on your team – a certain amount of “running interference” was permitted . If the ball was not caught – and we were always absolutely fair – then it would be the opposing team to send the ball back in the same manner .

One of the factors living in a small village was of course everyone knew everyone – this had it plus points but also its minus – and of course with all youngsters growing up there were what we now call peer group pressures and most certainly leaders and followers – the leader most certainly from my memory was Fred Bonney – he lived with his dad in the cottage between Tinneys Lane and Downs Hill – at the rear in the orchard was a disused cider press. I never knew what happened to Fred's mum but he was looked after

to some degree by an Aunt would lived in Fore Street – however with out the sort of parent control that most of us had he did enjoy much more freedom –if there was any mischief then it was sure to be have led by Fred

Golant was and still is to some degree surrounded by orchards – while most of these were for cider making there were a few which had some very tasty eating apples – one such orchard was owned by my aunt close to Tanhay Cottage – although she had sold the cottage the orchard was retained and we of course were able to take advance of that – however it did not have the excitement of the time honoured occupation of scrumping .

One of the best trees was in the ownership of Captain Digby who lived at what is now the Cormorant Hotel – this tree was close to the lower path leading to the downs – as I was one of the smallest the older boys would lift me up to reach over the fence to pick the apples – on one occasion Capt Digby observed this and two days later I was summoned before my Dad and given a right ticking off for my part in this - - they would call it grounded now . Much more serious however and looking back not the very best moment in the life of the youngsters in Golant was the attack on an orchard in the valley leading up from Sawmills – this orchard had some really prime fruit and was well know to the local youngsters – it was a prime target - on one sortie a considerable amount of the crop was taken and the owner was much annoyed and reported it to the law - we had visits from the local constabulary and serious action was threatened if we continued – Later that year at bonfire night we sought to effect retribution to the owner of the crop by throwing a large number of fireworks into his garden – sensibly he just ignored this stupid act and the matter was forgotten but to this day I feel ashamed at my actions in this .

There was another continual sore with the youngsters in the village and that was over the use of the railway during Sundays – no trains were ever run and we felt that it was our right to walk the line on Sundays and often did so either coming from or going to the downs. On one occasion we were on the railway when we were stopped by one of the Railway police – there had been some vandalism at the docks and were making a patrol – we had to give our names and then each of our parents received a formal warning letter – I think in fairness my parents took this letter as being over the top reaction to what the village felt in general was an acceptable use of the railway on a Sunday – today no doubt with all the health and safety legislation we would have been prosecuted .

One of the requirement in belonging to a very small and close knit bunch of youngsters was of course you had to be accepted as a part of the gang – this required many different forms and one of these was to take part in an initiation – this comprised of being required to go up the addit just off the railway line to the south of the level crossing – it was not that far but had a slight bend in to so you did lose the light - - actually it was not a great deal really as there were not street lights in the village at that time so most of us had no fear of the dark – however it was very damp and had at that time and perhaps still does have bats in the addict so the squeamish might have been a little concerned.. During the year we were often joined by extended members of the village family – particularly the Tabbs – they had a very large number of cousins and were readily taken into the group –

other children came from further a field – such as Bruce Fletcher and his pal Roger – they always came for the summer holidays.

The Reading room – now the village hall - was available to the youngsters but only under supervision – we not allowed until we were older to play snooker or billiards but could use the table tennis room – we were very fortunate to have in the village Edgar Cliff whose family lived at what is now known as Cheyles – he had played for Cornwall and was an excellent coach and all benefitted from this experience.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the place that the Chapel had in my childhood – Dad was self taught to play the organ and we always attended worship on Sunday – there may have been times in my early teens when I rebelled against this regime but I have never regretted benefitting from the Christian teaching received over the years and to that end I chose to accept that way of life and its standards and beliefs and the impact it has made on my own behaviour – yes of course I have failed often to live up to the high ideals that the Christian faith demands yet throughout the many difficulties and disappointments I have always felt that the choice I made was the right one. Perhaps one of the key criteria was the fact that I acknowledged the debt of gratitude I owed to my parents who in spite of considerable odds managed to raise me through an untreatable chest condition, saw me through many stays in hospital and were tolerant of my antagonism particularly in the teens when one rebelled against the inability to do what I really wished to do.

The newcomers into the village were fairly sparse in the early years – just now and again a property would be sold and someone came – one particular event was when the vicarage was sold and a titled gentleman and lady arrived – I think the lady was from Scandinavia I recall – they used to have shouting matches that all the village were party too – quite an event for such a quiet and out of the way village. They were replaced many years later by a super couple Roger and Sheila Du Volley who took a very active part in the life of the village.

Even though my family were very connected to the chapel – I was a firm friend of the daughter of the landlord of the New Inn – At that time the remains of the wall of the cottage right on the water front was left and we used to use this a sort of squash court with tennis rackets and ball – we were upset when the wall was removed and the car park – small though it is was enlarged.

I have already recounted in the Golant Pill the event that took place when the film Miranda was made – Fred Bonney and I were responsible to having the action showing Miranda getting on to the train repeated as we appeared at the end of the platform exactly when the filming took place – we beat a hasty retreat and looked from a distance as the train had to retrace its steps and take the shot again - It appears in the film for about 50 seconds - Golants' one moment of glory on the silver screen .

Another event which occasionally took place was the appearance of the threshing machine at Scantleburys Farm – now developed with a three houses – the machine would

be towed to the farm by tractor and the grain threshed - - the children were kept well clear during this process but allowed to observe from a safe distance – sensible health and safety precaution in place without any of the present day legislation. Another event was of course the making of cider – this took place at Reg Tabbs cottage at Tanhay . I think that was the only cider press that was still used – we lads used to suck the apple juice straight from the trough and consequently made frequent visits to the loo afterwards - !!

In the summer we used to camp at the downs – there was then quite an area of grass but the lack of grazing over the years now means that it is almost all overgrown with bracken – the village had several small farms and this grazing was an accepted common right – I doubt whether any grazing now takes place as also was the swailing of the bracken – sometimes this would be occasioned when sparks from the steam engine caught fire the lower part of the downs but more often than not it was deliberately controlled .

It may seem strange but we always took our family holidays during the first week of August – Dad even though he was a professional seaman had converted a ship's lifeboat into a cabin cruiser with auxiliary sail and we went to Falmouth – often mooring at Freshwater on the St Mawes river – the Peters family who owned the yard were old friends. We had many adventures there – the family used to go in three boats, my Uncle Siah from Mevagissey in his boat Jeanette, , my Uncle Will from Par in the Silver Spray and us on the Julie Stuart . The accommodation on all three little boats was very spartan and it never ceases to amaze me that we cooked meals on paraffin stove with oven in such a small space. During the summer months we often all met up on the river and regularly had picnics at Ethy Quay.