16/4/09

Dear Ticleke

I see from my diary that we went to visit the Foxenden deep shelter and the Spike in Warren Road During Heritage week on September 13th, Janet and I enjoyed your excellent conducted tour. We hope to bring some of our grandchildren at a later date.

While we were in Warren Road, I told you that I was born at St Luke's Hospital and lived until 1953 in Cline Road Guildford. You said you would like me to write a page on my memories of life during my early years.

Starting is not difficult, as I was born 15th April *1938,* but knowing when to stop is more of a problem. The memories keep flooding back, so I hope I won't bore you.

My sister Kathleen and I lived at 91 Cline Road, Kathleen is 3 years older than me. One of my earliest recollections of life was being parked in my pram on a tiled paved area outside our back door. The sun shone brilliantly on the huge chimney at the top of our garden. The glare of this caused me to squint. I later learned this chimney was part of the boiler-house and heating system supplying hot water. This water was piped all round St Luke's Hospital and the "Huts". The huts were erected (so I am told) to cope with the casualties of the first World War. I expect the coke fired boilers were also used to burn waste material from the hospital. The chief engineer at St Luke's was a man called Mr May, who lived in Pewley Way. The only other person I remember working at the boiler house was a a man known as "Wriggles" who was a stoker. I think Wriggles could hear but not speak, so conversation was difficult, but my mum encouraged us to be kind to him, and used to throw him some apples from our two trees. Wriggles thought this was a real treat, and ate them with relish. I think he used to feed the pigs in the sties about *50* yards away from the boiler house.

My Grandad (Mr Jesse Peters) lived at 45 Cline Road and his house was over shadowed by the workhouse, or as he always referred to it as The Union" He really didn't talk much about the workhouse, as it was quite well screened with Sycamore saplings and other self seeded trees. The workhouse appeared dismal, and I suppose sinister to us, so didn't rate high in our conversation. We sometimes saw a few residents from the workhouse walking in the streets nearby, but they seemed" shadowy" figures to us. All the men wore similar grey, shapeless, ill-fitting, hairy tweed suits, so people didn't make much contact with them. I don't remember seeing many women at the workhouse. Perhaps they had more chores to do, or were less inclined to venture far. I knew very few of the men by name, but one younger man, was a familiar figure in the district, who was known as Alfie. He was very tall and thin, again with his workhouse clothes, topped with a raincoat. His unruly hair was bursting out from under his cap and his large irregular teeth gave him a grotesque appearance. I was instructed by my family to pity him and not taunt him as so many children did. Again Alfie didn't appear to speak properly, so the sight of him could be quite daunting. Many people showed compassion for Alfie. The market stall -holders on Friday and Saturdays in North Street, used to let him help them with the clearing up and pushing their steel-wheeled market stalls to yards in the side-streets nearby. I was pleased to see this and think they were quite charitable towards him (I hope so).

In North Street there was a slaughter house and this was approached by a steep slope from the road. The animals to be slaughtered invariably arrived in goods-trucks from the sidings at Guildford station. I don't know how it happened, but Alfie would appear by" magic" to assist in driving the animals from the goods-yard into Bridge Street, Onslow Street to North Street, Colbrooks slaughterhouse. I think this must have been his favourite "job". He certainly presented an imposing figure, with his flailing coat-tails, waving his cap and stick, while shouting at the top of his voice. The terrified animals thought they had endured enough during their traumatic journey, but hadn't been prepared for this new experience. Quite often the animals thought an escape bid was a better option, and took off to other parts of the town They often caused havoc by bursting into shops and other enclosed places, (I never actually saw a bull in the proverbial china shop ,one day we children were excited to see a cow had jumped into the walled front garden of number I 7, Chertsey Street. We were told the cow had "gone mad" so it was decided to slaughter it in the garden. The dead cow then had to be lifted with a tripod, block and tackle onto a truck this was of course great excitement for us.

Every Sunday afternoon the Salvation Army would hold a service (they preferred to call it a meeting) in North Street, and without fail, Alfie would be there and with great pride he went round the people present with their collecting box. I think this was the highlight ofhis week. It was nice to see how well the Salvation Army and other people responded to him.

During the 2nd World War there was the much publicised "Dig For Victory" campaign people were encouraged to cultivate any spare pieces of land. The grassed areas around St Luke's Hospital and the Huts were all cultivated, also the land which is now occupied by Holy Trinity school which was about 4 acres. I think this had always been able to supply vegetables for the hospital an d the work been carried out by the men from the workhouse. The pigs which were kept in the sties behind the wall above my dads and Mr Holdens allotments. Mr and Mrs Holden lived next door, in the last house number 1 13,(this hard area is now the school's playground. I think Wriggles and other workhouse residents used to look after the pigs. After the war the "Dig For Victory" campaign lost impetus. The pigs ceased to be fattened there, and the men from the workhouse stopped cultivating any of the hospital grounds. It probably wasn't considered correct to keep pigs so close to the hospital and it wasn't ethical to "force" meirfrom the workhouse to work in the fields. As boys we used to "fmd our way" through the railings and joined the old men there for a chat. No-one seemed to be in charge of them, so didn't seem to be overworked. They would sit on the banks for a rest and a "fag". We chatted to them about their past lives. Often they were ex-service men, who failed for various reasons to adapt to civilian life. Some men had been in domestic service, and had become too old to carry out their duties, so had been forced to leave their jobs and tied cottages. There were so many harrowing stories, so we were soon learning that life was not as cosy as we imagined. These men didn't want to return to the workhouse with any money, or they would have to contribute to their keep. They used to hide their fags and baccy money in tobacco tins in the hedges on the way home. I wondered how safe their "stash" was and I expect some died before they were able to retrieve them, very sad.

We always referred to the gate at Warren Road as the Spike, but never realised this was an official name. I don't think there was an other gate in the wall at that time,(I think the wall was opened up to make an entrance later) We never wished to investigate beyond the gate which the "Tramps" entered. I think we had a good idea that life inside was austere. My sister and I walked up and down Warren Road to visit an aunt who was housekeeper! cook at Leewood number 32, for Mr and Mrs Conway-Jones. On the way we often passed wretched souls squatting on the pavement waiting for admission time. The weather was cold and wet, quite often, but they weren't able too gain entry until the appointed time. They often asked us what the time was, but we didn't have much idea, as we didn't own a watch. We didn't feel at all threatened by them, even their appearance could have been frightening,we were often in a small group, but it was always safe for us to walk around the countryside unaccompanied.

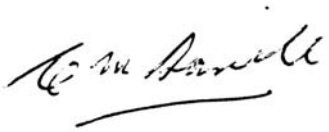
I think the name Spike was derived from the tool still used to-day for making splices in ropes, and which they called the Marlin Spike.

Some of the tramps or "mile-stone inspectors" we used to chat to on the road, told us they suffered indignity when going to the spike, and chose to sleep in sheds or hedgerows to avoid this, (It can't have been pleasant at all).

During the night of the 16th May 1941, a 500 lb high explosive bomb fell in the road 50 yards from our house. Four houses were so badly damaged that they had to be demolished. They were numbers 71 and 73, on the north side and numbers 64 and 66 on the south side. Mr Washington, a friend and neighbour of ours was killed in this explosion. I was asleep at the time but it didn't wake me up. My dad was in the Auxillary Fire Service during the war, and being a bricklayer was employed building" water basins" (emergency water supplies). On the night of the bombing, he was away fighting fires at Bristol docks. He was allowed to return home to Guildford the next morning to organise temporary accomodation for us. I can vaguely remember sheltering with my mum and sister and four elderly neighbours in the disused coal-cellar under the stairs, which my dad considered to be the strongest and safest part of the house. I can remember being wheeled in my pushchair over mountains of chalk, thrown up in the road. We walked to a friends house on the Epsom Road. We stayed there for the rest of the night, before travelling to New Haw, Addlestone. We stayed with an aunt and uncle there for several weeks, while our house was repaired. This wasn't an ideal place to stay, because it was only one field away from the perimeter fence of the Vickers Armstrong aircraft factory, so was a prime target for the enemy attack, but "any port in a storm". For many years we had a large piece of shrapnel ,which was recovered during the repairs to our house, it measured 1 1" x 6" with a large hole torn through the middle and was thick, so very heavy. Unfortunately someone read the history painted on it and stole it.

Cline Road was quite a poor area with several large families in council houses. Even though it was often described as a “rough area” it was the place where I had lived and grown up in, so I loved it. We walked and rode our bikes everywhere, so we knew and talked to everyone in the area. There was such a community spirit. I Was deeply upset when my mum and dad said they were contemplating buying a new house in Merrow. These houses were being built and made available for council tenants to purchase. There was no need as far as I was concerned, and thought the purchase price of £2,000 was outrageous.

Best Wishes.



Cohn Saville.