LYMPSTONE LIVES - MICK CORNISH

Mick Cornish and his wife Gill have been married for 57 years and have lived every one of them in Lympstone. They were both born in the village, and even during his years in the RAF Mick was able to spend at least some time in Lympstone, the one exception being in 1958. They have two children, six grandchildren and two great grandchildren. Now approaching his eightieth year, Mick is often seen out and about in the village; he takes an active interest in everything around him and is always happy to share his wonderful historical knowledge of the village and its residents.

‘I was born on 26 May 1938 in our house, 2 Harefield Cottages, the youngest of three brothers and two sisters. Sadly, I never really knew my father who was killed in action at the start of the Second World War. It must have been difficult for my mother to be left with six children, but we managed, and I don’t remember ever wanting for anything. I went to Lympstone Primary School and then the Exmouth Boys School in 1949.

Lympstone was very different in those days; it seemed a lot busier, filled with shops, banks, a chemist, Charlie Venus the barber, an ironmonger, a fish and chip shop and even an undertaker with a mortuary on the premises. Hodge’s the bakery was one of my favourites, where you could buy four delicious buns for a penny. There was a coal yard, Foxwell, at Longmeadow Rd that had coal delivered to the railway station siding for the steam trains; I remember the station had a proper ticket office and waiting room with a coal fire. There were hardly any cars in the village then, just the doctor’s and Walter Webb who kept his lorry where the sailing club is now.

Lympstone Train Station in some of its former glory.

As a boy I was always on the go; I learned to row a boat when I was ten, built rafts, walked in the brook, and was always on the lookout for valuable bits and pieces on the foreshore. I’d collect bits of lead and copper wire on the beach, and then swap them for a few fishing hooks from one of the shopkeepers, ‘Doggy’ Shears as he was known. I suppose I grew up being a hunter-gatherer; I’d row out to the ‘Lympstone lake’ in the estuary on my own, drop an anchor, and have five or six lines down at once to catch flounders. I caught a silver eel once and sold it for the princely sum of two shillings. My fishing grew into a part time job; I had my own little salmon boat for about ten years; the biggest salmon I caught was 26 and a half pounds. I’d sell my catch to the local fish merchant. I sometimes used to shoot the rats with my air gun for Harry Prings at his piggery.

I left school at 15, started a plumbing apprenticeship and then did my National Service for two years with the RAF. For most of that time I was based in Yemen. When I came back I finished my apprenticeship and eventually started my own plumbing business, which I kept on until I retired. I’ve enjoyed being involved in village life; I was part of the scout group for many years and led the Beating of the Bounds walk for nearly twenty years. I was one of the first of the ‘Twinners’ and was there at the signing of the Charter at Bieville Beuville in France in 1979; we’ve had lots of our French friends staying with us over the years. I still enjoy going to France, particularly to the Onion Festival weekend at Roscoff. I’ve been an allotment holder in the village for about fifty years.

The three biggest influences in my life were my mother, who really made me what I am today, National Service, a real eye opener for me at the time, and the Fifties, a time when there were jobs for all and it was a more peaceful world.