

Glimpses of the Past

1915. Memories of a six-year-old Dovorian

Editor's Note. This is another extract from the writings of Budge Adams.

In Newsletter 44 there is an account of Budge's birth at 37 Castle Street and in Newsletter 45 an episode in 1914 when a bomb dropped in Dover. Here I have selected some of Budge's memories of 1915, when he was six years old.

My parents allowed me considerable freedom of movement. When we left Millais Road in 1915 I was not yet six years old but I had explored, in the company of my friends in the road, the wide open spaces of 'Cow Pastures', the land on the northern side of the Deal railway beyond Stanhope Road, where Napier Road has now been built, and extending almost to Guston. To us it was an enormous grassy world entirely our own and miles and miles from civilisation.

In this year the civilian population was issued with ration cards, — actually small booklets with pages printed with little squares each representing the unit amount of entitlement of the food concerned and the applicable week. These squares were marked off by the retailer and this was considered sufficient evidence that the ration had been taken up. I still possess some of our ration books which show, among other things that we were each entitled to one ounce of butter every week. Margarine, when available, could be bought in larger quantities and was not rationed. Meat and bread were rationed in the same way and we had sufficient. In our case our father's rabbits and pigeons were very useful and I still have the mental picture of him holding a rabbit suspended by the ears and killing it with a sharp blow with the side of his hand across the back of its neck. The skins were stretched out on frames to cure and, from some of the earliest, my mother made a muff for my sister and fur mittens for us both and, having done that, she made simi-

lar things for other children in Millais Road.

There was an early 'Dig for Victory' project and one could see fruit and vegetables being grown in front gardens or on any little piece of ground that received some light and air. I think clothing was difficult to acquire, but I cannot be sure whether this was generally because of scarcity of goods or scarcity of money. I believe in our case it was the latter.

In the early months of 1915 my father was a very worried man and the shadow of the effect of the war on our family was already becoming apparent. For two reasons: one to save cost and the other to be able to put in the maximum hours of work, father moved the family back to 37 Castle Street and we made a home again in the rooms above the shop.

Our return to Castle Street was important to me as an individual although I am sure I did not realise it at the time. We were once again living in the centre of town and I became more aware of the war that was going on around us. Millais Road was only a mile from the sea front but there one had the feeling of living in the hinterland and as children we often knew nothing of happenings lower down in the town.

Only with hindsight do I know that the whole country was on a 'total war footing' but there was one thing that in my childish unsophisticated way I did know about. The whole country was enjoined to save this or save that, coal, electricity, wood, iron, wa-

ter, anything.

I recall the drive to save water. We were given to understand that it was unpatriotic and very wasteful to use more than four inches of water for a bath. I remember asking my mother if anyone could possibly be more patriotic than the King and Queen. My mother agreed that no one could be. I then asked if they would bath in four inches of water and my mother said that, certainly, they would do the same as everyone else. I remember being horrified at this, that, losing all their dignity, they would be forced to sit or lie in four inches of water because the Prime Minister had said so. Their dignity was further compounded, in my eyes, by the fact that I was bathed in an oval galvanised bath with outwardly sloping sides and about three feet long by two feet wide at the top, set on a table in the scullery. I knew of no other way and I thought the royal family would do the same, but in a bigger bath in a bigger room with a servant to pour in the water. My mother didn't disillusion me - I wonder why?

Our return to Castle Street and the constant naval and military activity in the lower part of the town greatly increased the balance held in my 'memory bank'. With the taking over of the skating rink on the sea front and its conversion to an aircraft hangar, the R.N.A.S. became a centre of attention with its small mahogany flying boats (Shorts, I think) and with a squadron of float seaplanes. They also had two squadrons of aircraft in hangars off Reach Road in Langdon and some small 'Blimps' or semirigid airships for observation purposes at Guston. Boundary Groyne (always known to us as Castle Jetty) generated much interesting activity and even more later on when there was built a launching runway from which two-seater planes were crudely catapulted into the air and sometimes, unfortunately, into the sea!

The launchway consisted of two long shal-

low wooden channels of suitable width and span to fit the floats which were a standard modification to an otherwise normal land-based aircraft. The wooden channels were well greased and because of this it was not possible to use chocks to restrain the aircraft's desire to leap into the air when the throttle was opened. I seem to remember that the aircraft was held back by as many airmen as could find some part of it to hold on to or push against. The engine was opened up and on the order 'Chocks Away' all the airmen dropped to the ground and the aeroplane leapt off the end of the jetty and, quite frequently, into the air. I cannot believe that even in those days the R.N.A.S. would have approved of such a dangerous operation and though I can clearly see it in my mind's eye, I think the picture must have a highly imaginative content triggered by the sight of a crowd of airmen watching what was then, to a youngster of my tender age, something very novel.

In 1915, on the north-eastern side of the jetty, a concrete slipway was built for the launching and beaching of both flying boats and seaplanes. Later on, another hangar was erected on the eastern side of the seaplane shed and this also had its own concrete slipway. There was a winding-motor house at the side of each hangar, and, running over pulleys and crossing the road, a wire to haul the aircraft on a cradle, up to the hard standing.

On the western side of the jetty there was often, especially to us children, the fascinating sight, on some high tides, of one of the little flying boats being hoisted out of the water by crane and deposited on the sea front, where the 'loos' now stands. If they were serviceable and operationally ready, the little flying boats lay at anchor a couple of hundred metres out. For heavier or more intricate maintenance work they were lifted out by crane.