

David Lilley - About Me (9/6/2008)

I was born in Clacton, a seaside town in Essex on 1st December 1921.

I've always been puzzled as to why I was only given one forename, David, as my two older sisters had three each and most people seem to have at least two.

We moved in 1926 to Southend, which helped my father to reduce his travelling time to his work in London.

Southend-on-Sea, to give it its full title, is not really 'on-Sea' as it is on the northern bank of the estuary of the River Thames. I remember very little about Clacton but I remember that Southend was enclosed by many fields, paths and country roads which gave us the opportunity to go for regular family walks and later, when I got a bicycle, to spend days cycling around the roads which linked up with Shoeburyness, Wakering, Barling, Westcliff and Leigh.

Believe it or not, before about 1936 I seldom saw a car and very few people had a telephone. My school career started at a little private school "Lancaster House" where I remember our craft lessons consisted of knitting, both boys and girls. Now, at my request, my mother had taught me to knit and I found that I was so good that I competed for the honour of being the fastest knitter in the class, except for one girl, and we each had our group of fours in the class who reported on every line of knitting as it was completed.

I persuaded my parents to send me to the local state primary school when I was about eight years of age as I wanted to play football instead of knitting.

From the primary school "Hamstel Road School", in the same road in which I now live, I qualified to go to Southend Grammar school where to my great delight I was able to spend a great deal of time playing hockey, that is with a small hard ball on grass, football and cricket. My prowess at cricket was soon recognised when, in my first summer games, I bowled out the games master who was supposed to be teaching us the game.

Three years in the school 1st eleven at hockey and cricket made my school years very pleasant.

They did try to teach me subjects called English, Mathematics, French, Science, Chemistry and Latin but I did not excel at these and in 1938 I left and took a job at the Southend Borough Treasurer's office.

In February 1939 I joined the local unit of the Territorial Army, a part time organisation which was training young men to become soldiers in view of the worsening situation in Europe. On 1st September 1939 I was called up for permanent service with my T/A unit which was trained to operate searchlights to shine on any enemy aircraft which might attack England.

We were deployed on the Norfolk coast to intercept German bombers coming across to bomb the central cities of England. In addition to our searchlight equipment we were issued with two rifles between the ten of us each with five rounds of ammunition and a Lewis Machine gun. Thank goodness Hitler did not know how ill-equipped we were.

I was eventually sent on a course of instruction to be taught what radar was and how to operate radar equipment.

I can't remember how long I spent on each occupation but I remember servicing radar fitted to

search lights for some time before my unit was ordered to Tilbury, one of the ports of London, to be sent overseas.

This was after D-day, when we had commenced the invasion of Europe, and nobody seemed to know what to do with us! I passed through France, Belgium, Holland and eventually to Germany. When it became my turn to be "demobbed" i.e. demobilized, I was sent home with a new cheap suit of clothes and an overcoat and started work again in the Borough Treasurer's Dept.

Before leaving the army I had applied to be trained as a school teacher and I discovered what all those subjects were that they had tried to teach me in Grammar school; I never did understand what use Latin was, though!

My first teaching job was at a senior school [Wentworth High School, Southend] teaching 13-14 year-olds. Each Saturday morning I refereed a game of football and when that was finished I acted as one of the two umpires for a girls' hockey match. In the summer I helped train the boys and girls for athletics competition especially the high jumpers. I trained one girl who set a new high jump record for 15 year-olds in Southend and an acknowledged expert congratulated me on training a boy who perfected the "Western Roll" style of high jumping which was just becoming the recognised style for all international jumpers.

I stayed in this job for three years and moved to Harlow, still in Essex where amongst other things I taught junior age children and organised the boys' football team. They became so good that I told them not to score so many goals as other teams were becoming discouraged. On one occasion I knew the team we were to play were not very good, so I told our boys not to take the number of goals we scored into double figures. We won by nine goals to nil.

When I moved to Harlow I joined a village cricket team and it was here that I met Joan who came every Saturday to make teas for the team and we got married in 1956 and we moved back to Southend. The next school I taught at was Hamstel Road School, where I had once been a pupil.

I then got promotion to deputy headmaster of a primary school in Basildon, Essex and then to the headship of another [Laindon Park] from which I retired in 1986.

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I first became interested in collecting stamps when my father showed me a small album that he had. The stamps were arranged in countries and as far as I remember they were fixed in position using stamp hinges i.e. small pieces of gummed paper which made it easy to change them from one page to another.

I collected all the stamps I could lay hands on and I did particularly well with Australian and Argentinian stamps as my father worked for a bank which had regular correspondence with these countries.

I made the mistake of collecting stamps of all countries and soon became a mammoth task soaking them off the envelopes, drying, pressing them and arranging them in sets in my albums.

In order to recognise the stamps which had been issued by different countries I acquired stamp catalogues, usually Christmas or birthday presents and I got more interested in the possible varieties which collectors were interested in, variations of colour, watermarks in the paper used and differences in the perforations on the edges of stamps.

"Stanley Gibbons", a world authority in philately, published catalogues of all the stamps in the world and ran a scheme whereby they would send monthly selections of stamps mint or used, general or of particular countries. The condition was that I had to buy five shillings worth of stamps each month. This was quite a drain on my resources taking most of my pocket money. Five shilling was a quarter of £1 i.e. 25p in modern money. Values are very difficult to realise as this was about 1932.

Fortunately my mother got interested in these "pretty pictures" I was having sent to me and my pocket money was saved by her buying sets of mint stamps for a collection of her own.

I eventually made my own albums of loose-leaf files which made rearranging much easier.

During the 1939-45 war I was stationed for a time in Holland and the Dutch people were very short of almost everything. I had saved up some bars of soap with which I had been issued and I swapped about six of these for some very early English stamps about a hundred years old. None very valuable but all examples of stamps I knew I had not got in my collection.

When an uncle of mine died I inherited his stamp collection which included a used and an unused specimen of an English commemorative stamp of 1924. [£1 Postal Union Congress 1929] The used specimen was worth about £30 and the unused one £200.

I have seldom bought stamps for my collection, just mentioned it to my friends that it is my hobby and they give me any that they acquire instead of throwing them away.

Now that so many countries print labels that they put on parcels etc. to show that postage has been paid it has become quite difficult to get hold of modern postage stamps and I do not think I shall be adding to the twenty-two loose-leaf files which now hold my collection.