

Ralph Salter

Memories of Hop Picking at Bodiam

I came annually to Bodiam from 1946 until the final closure.

My parents were Alfred & Rose Salter and we used to hire a furniture lorry with 3 other families to come down from Bermondsey.

We had hut nos 1 & 2 on Clover Field Ockham every year. Throughout the year we used to collect spare rolls of wallpaper and on the day of arrival they would be used to decorate both huts and put up curtains etc.

Dad was a binman (pole puller) and usually worked with Charlie Simmons, Ernie Jones, Bert Blanch and sometimes Peter Knapp.

I was born in 1941 so was gradually weaned into picking until I was 11 when I managed to bring my push bike down with me and did a messenger boys job for a few years working with Molly [Richardson] and Jane in the offices at Ockham. It meant flying around all the various camps delivering messages to the bosses.

At 14 I then did a bookers (bookies) job for 3 seasons and then progressed to the binman's job that I had always wanted to do. Sheer paradise - so much fun and such lovely people.

When Clover Field closed we moved to Crainham Wood and when the hand picking finished I moved on to tractor driving at the Udiam machines. My mate and I used to rent a caravan at Combe Haven (now Haven Holidays) [St Leonards-on-Sea] and we used to leave the site at 6.30am and get back nearly 12 hours later.

I think the last year I was there was about 1968 having never missed a year.

Memories?

Saturday night trips on the back of a flat back lorry to the "other" Castle Inn in Ewhurst which had a "Hoppers Barn".

Sunday - all day football matches on Clover Field using the sides of the two cookhouses as goals.

Carting the water up the hill from the side of the faggot stack up to our huts.

Standing at the open door of the hut during a thunderstorm watching the lightning moving around the sky and listening to the rain hammering on the corrugated iron roof.

Taking the Sunday roast up Dagg Lane to Mrs Blanch to cook for us (all for a shilling).

Putting halfpennies on the line hoping that the train that we called the Bumper turned them into pennies!

Sheltering in a hut at the bottom of Hooks or Pond field when a meteorite landed in the field just the other side of the railway lines about 50 yards away.

The locals that we used to play with were Alan Jones, John Denyer. Dot and Vera Simmons.