

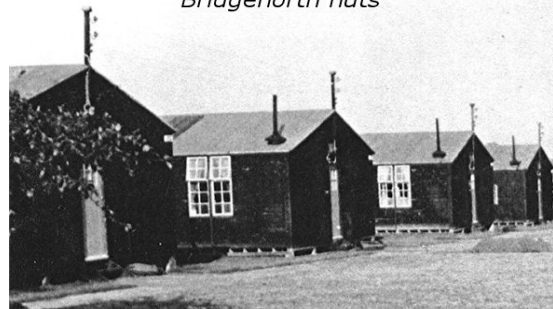
### 3. Royal Air Force

My National Service call up papers arrived informing me that I had to have a medical examination to prove that I was fit enough. The medical at a clinic in Hanley was a farce. After being measured and weighed and examined by ears nose throat and eyesight we were told to remove all clothes stand on tiptoe look to the left and cough. Two days later I received a letter and told to appear before a selection panel in Hanley. There I was given an elementary intelligence test and asked did I want to be in the Army or the Air Force. I told them the Air Force. They told me that my test results meant that I could be in the Air Force. My mate Flash failed the medical because he weighed too much for his height. All of his weight was muscle because of his body building there was not an ounce of fat on him. I told you that the medical examination was a farce.

On 2nd February 1960 I packed a suitcase and caught a train to Cardington in Bedfordshire where they took away all my clothes and issued me with two sets of uniform, a pair of boots, a pair of shoes, underpants, socks, two sets of pyjamas, knife, fork, spoon, a set of shoe brushes and a kit bag. I signed for all of this and then had another medical examination where they made me walk up and down a room in the nude whilst two very bored looking medical staff looked on. "Passed get dressed". For two weeks at Cardington a class of 30 new entrants had lessons about the Air Force and marching. There were about 100 new entrants from all over the Country. The majority of the entrants were volunteers from Scotland where there had been a recruiting campaign. Life was very easy although we were not allowed out of camp. After two weeks we were herded into coaches at 7.00 PM and some time later the coach stopped and I heard a lot of shouting and screaming. I sauntered down to the front of the coach wondering what all the fuss was about. Suddenly an RAF corporal with his face two inches away from mine was screaming and swearing at me telling me to move very quickly and join a line of other men. I had arrived in Bridgenorth at what was called Basic Training. This consisted of seven weeks of being shouted at, parading up and down, marching in step, cross country runs, rifle drill, shooting but mostly washing, scrubbing and polishing. We were billeted in a hut that slept 24 men in two rows of 12 with two stoves in the centre. The stoves were powered by coke a smokeless fuel derived from coal and not a sugary drink or a strange white powder. It was bitterly cold in the wooden hut so the stoves had to be continually stoked until they glowed red. The floor of the hut was wooden with linoleum covering that had to be kept polished to a high shine, as did my boots and bed space. Every morning there was a hut inspection preceded with the shout "Stand by your beds!" We had to stand to attention with full uniform on with everywhere spotless and the beds correctly made with "hospital corners". In order to achieve this we had to be up polishing and scrubbing at 7.00 AM. Anything that did not meet the high standards resulted in one hour of extra parades before we were allowed to go to supper. At the end of basic training we given aptitude tests, the result of which I was informed by an officer that my maths and English made me an ideal candidate for



*Bridgenorth huts*



“Clerks Postal”, a job sorting mail. I asked about my performance in technical expertise and was told that I had also performed very well but I could only work on technical jobs if I signed on as a regular airman for 5 years and not National Service for 2 years. I told him that I didn’t want to sign on for 5 years. He said that I could sign on for 3 years. Again I told him “No thank you”. With a smile on his face he said “OK Air Wireless Mechanic”.



In early April I reported to RAF Yatesbury Radio School for 13 weeks technical training on airborne wireless equipment. RAF Yatesbury was situated in Wiltshire on the A4 road to London. As an Air Wireless Mechanic life was quite good, every weekend was free and on Saturday nights a group of us would walk into Calne about 5 miles away and drink cider at one shilling (5 New Pence) a pint. This stuff had a strange affect on legs making them rubbery and uncontrollable. Somehow we managed to return to camp before midnight. One night in the pub in Calne I met a WRAF (a lady of the Womens RAF) named Trudy who was based at Compton Bassett a RAF camp situated between Calne and Yatesbury. More of Trudy later. One Saturday morning a holiday weekend, a mate of mine who lived in Manchester asked if I wanted a lift to Stoke on Trent. He had a Messerschmit KR175 bubble car. It carried two people sitting astride the engine one behind the driver. It was the longest hottest journey ever. The sun was beating down through the perspex roof and the heat from the engine was rising under my seat as we made a top speed of 45 mph for 140 miles and no motorways. We returned on Monday when fortunately the weather was cloudy and the heat bearable. Life was not all roses at Yatesbury I had the occasional guard duty to do. This meant sleeping in the Guardhouse for two hours and patrolling the camp for two hours through the night. One other duty was

the sporting weekend when I got chosen for the Mile race. Four laps of the track before I staggered home in seventh place. The announcer broadcast that the Camp record for the mile was held by SAC Ibbotson, the same Derek Ibbotson who held the world record in under 4 minutes in 1957. One weekend Trudy asked me if I would go to London with her and stay at her parents house. We caught the train from Chippenham and were met by Trudy’s parents at

Paddington Station in their Daimler. When we arrived at their house I realised that her parents were rich, very rich indeed. For a coal miner's son from Hanley I had only seen houses like this on the films. A large staircase and 5 or 6 huge rooms downstairs leading off a hall with a tiled floor. Trudy took me upstairs to the guest bedroom which was as big as my house in Northwood. Trudy's parents were very polite and asked me all sorts of questions about my job before the Air Force. I answered using my Kings English voice and survived the weekend without making any major faux pas. It slowly dawned on me that Trudy's parents were Jewish, I had never met a Jew before but they were very polite and treated me like an honoured guest. On the train going back Trudy told me that her parents did everything that they could to stop her joining the Air Force and that she did it to rebel after a very strict Jewish childhood. I think that she took me home to show her parents just how rebellious she had become by going around with a working class Gentile. One of my last memories of Yatesbury was when a group of us went to Stonehenge for the Summer Solstice on 21 June 1960 we took plenty of cider and waited all night for the Druids to arrive for their festivities. The Chief Druid berated us for desecrating the holy place. "Get yer nightie off!" someone shouted. He was not pleased.



In early July I left Yatesbury and reported to my permanent station at RAF Cosford. Cosford's main function was as a training camp for RAF Boy Entrants from ages 16 to 18. When I arrived at Cosford I met Chiefy the Flight Sergeant who was in charge of the workshops. He was overjoyed when I told him that I was qualified in airborne UHF equipment and he gave me a UHF equipment lab to maintain. I was the only member of the workshops who was qualified in UHF. I was promoted to SAC (Senior Aircraftman) and although Corporal Bob Hopper was in charge of me, as long as the UHF lab was working I was left alone. This gave me every weekend off as well as Wednesday afternoons sports day. I played football for Cosford in Winter and tennis in Summer. Having weekends free was great. A building company from Stoke on Trent (Seddons) had a contract at Cosford and ran a coach every day from Hanley

to Cosford and back. I was able to use this free coach and on Saturdays I went back to work for Cadmans on the TV repair vans. Friday nights in The Albert Inn, Saturday nights Stompers Jazz Club, Sunday either hiking, cycling or lunch at The Duke of Wellington pub in Hanley. More of this pub later. The one obstacle that I had to overcome was "duties". At Cosford in addition to my day job I was on a rota for duties. These were Duty Fireman, Duty Electrician and Duty Corporal. Duty Corporal was the worst. They gave me an armband with corporal stripes and I had to ensure that all of the boy entrants (three huts of 24 boys) were in their bed and lights out by 10pm. I had no power to enforce this, the armband gave me no authority and I finally reached an agreement that they could keep lights on until 10.30 as long as they remained in their correct huts. The rotas for these duties were held in three boxes on filing cards. A WRAF girl in the Admin. section published the rota by taking seven cards from the

front of the box and publishing the names in Orders for the coming week. The cards then went to the back of the box and the next seven were taken from the front. One day I was in the Admin. office chatting to the rota girl and while she wasn't looking I found my three duty cards and removed them. I never again appeared on duty orders and fortunately nobody noticed. I made a bit of spare money on camp by servicing the televisions in the messes and officers quarters. I also did a bit of baby sitting for one of the officers when they attended mess functions.

There are two lots of people who you must stay friendly with in the Air Force. One is the Snowdrops (The RAF police who guard the camp), the other is the cooks. I repaired the televisions in both the guardhouse and the kitchen rest room, this gave me the privilege of going to late breakfast and having individually cooked bacon and egg. Fortunately I did not have to make use of my friendship with the Snowdrops, so called because they wore white hats. We had wooden huts at Cosford with 12 men per hut and the Corporal's rooms at the front end. There should have been two corporals but Bob Hopper had claimed both rooms and had his bed in one and his office in the other with easy chairs and a television. We had a very smelly airman in our hut who's name I have forgotten but we call him Doberman after a character in the TV series "Sergeant Bilko". One day Bob Hopper asked me to pass the word to the rest of the men that we were going to give Doberman a bath. The shower block and bath house was in an adjacent hut. Bob shouted "Doberman! Follow me" Doberman did and Bob walked over to the shower block as we all followed. Bob had previously filled a bath with icy cold water. "Grab him men!" Bob shouted. We all got hold of Doberman and heaved him fully clothed into the bath. Bob shouted "I am ashamed of all you men, picking on Doberman for no reason. You are all confined to the Billet for 15 minutes as PUNISHMENT."

One day I went with Bob Hopper in his car into Wolverhampton to visit the big stores and invite local girls who worked there to a dance at Cosford. The RAF would lay on transport from Wolverhampton and back in a coach. This was a great success, a local band was hired and a coachload of Wolverhampton lovelies arrived. A great night was had by all except that Bob had an assignation behind the mess with one of the girls and she missed the coach back which left at 10.30pm. Bob was too drunk to drive so he asked me to drive him and this girl back home in his Austin seven. This I duly did while Bob and the girl sat in the back seats. This meant that as far as Bob was concerned I could do no wrong. I was the only National Serviceman in Bob's hut and he sometimes took me to the Corporals Mess which was very comfortable with dart boards televisions and a snooker table. There was a cinema on camp called the Astra and the RAF motto is "Per ardua ad astra" ("Through adversity to the stars") which we translated as "After work we go to the pictures". My favourite film was "The creature from the black lagoon". This film seemed to be put on every week. It has since become a classic.



One weekend back at home I met Vera at The George Jazz Club. Two weeks later I asked her if she would like to come hiking on Sunday, much to my surprise she accepted. I said those memorable words "Cut your toenails, wear some sensible shoes and bring a can of soup".