

War Time Toys and ways of entertaining ourselves.

During the Second World War years, children's toys were hard to come by, so folk were encouraged to make them themselves out of oddments of scrap wood or tin etc.

During this period in time dad made me a four wheeled toy with a piece of carved wood looking more like a totem pole on wheels, the aluminium base with the wheels on, came from off part of the steering mechanism of a Wellington Bomber so I was told in later years, Dad called it the Sphinx, during my early youth while on day trips to Blisworth to see Uncle Bill and aunt Chloe I always took this toy with me towing it along the road or pavement while travelling to and fro.

One thing that gave me a great deal of pleasure as a child, was to be an inner tube from a Wellington Bomber, I would spend hours at a time playing with it in the old house garden.

Sometimes especially after we had moved from the old house that stood opposite Bugbrooke Village Hall, up to No 6 Camp Hill we would walk all the way to Blisworth instead of going by Bus or train, when doing so I have pulled the Sphinx all the way.

The other toy dad made us was a Lumber Cart; this also was towed by me or Malcolm my younger brother to and from Blisworth, and at times giving each other a small ride on it, as it was made so strong from out of Ash timber.

Another toy was a model Wellington Bomber aeroplane, this was made from one of its scraped parts, these toys I still have in my possession after all those years past.

The other thing that father made us was a Scooter made from oddments of Ash timber and metal wheels with bearings within them, this lasted us for many years and was handed down to Audrey and Stellar my younger sisters.

Dad made swings see saws, roundabouts along with many other contraptions to keep us contented as children.

Towards the end of the second world war one of the German Prisoners gave me a wooden toy that had four pecking chickens with a weight underneath so when one swung the contraption around the chickens started to peck at the board, like a fool I happened to take it into school one day as I was so proud to have such a toy, but the headmaster made me put in on the floor and stamp on it until it was all smashed up!, followed by having the cane for fraternizing with German prisoners of war, it was to have quite a bad effect on me and changed the way of thinking about certain types of people around me, but the good news was that the same German prisoner made me another one, but with a single pecking bird upon it that I still have to this day.

Over the years at Christmas times, we were given Ludo boards, Snakes and Ladders, Monopoly, and such likes, so during the days it was too wet or cold to go out, we spent hours playing with them.

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One Christmas Joe Able was to give me and Malcolm a Hornby wind up train set, that he had bought back from Germany, it consisted of a red engine with tender, two coaches one open wagon, a petrol wagon, and Guards van, it was in maculate condition even after many years of playing with it due to it being looked after, it upset Malcolm when mother gave it to someone in the family with young children to play with, for after than less than a fortnight it was bent and smashed to pieces.

Joe Abel was to bring a toy red grab crane on wheels that one could pick up dry sand and such likes with, Malcolm never let anyone get their hands on this toy, as it was his favourite, and he looked after it until the day he lost his life through illness.

We were given another toy called a Jabberwocky, it was a wind up crocodile that walked along the floor snapping its jaws open and shut.

Another toy we had was a toy Theatre with several backdrops and characters etc, that was made from card it had to be glued together that took quite some time to make but gave us hours of enjoyment, we made little men on one wheeled bicycles like Len Higginson rode about on the stage with, he was from a family of trick cyclist who used to visit our house quite regularly, and rode in Northampton Carnivals every year.

Another toy that had to be assembled from card was one with moving pictures on it; it consisted of a wheel made up with red and green transparent cellulose very much like a water wheel in a Mill, for it had a hopper above the wheel, that one poured dry salt into, that poured onto this wheel making it turn, followed by spilling into a retainer underneath, one pulled long strips of card with pictures upon it and once the wheel was turning, when viewing these pictures through the rotating red and green cellulose, it looked as though things were moving.

All went well until it got worn out and salt started to spill out from it, so mother put pay to it and confiscated it.

Audrey and Stellar had dolls and prams etc, Stella's dolls pram was handed down to our daughter Lisa and it is up in our attic at this moment in time.

Before I had a bicycle of my own that I build myself from parts scrounged from local tips, my favourite bit a kit was my catapult, that I very rarely missed with, for I had shot many a rabbit with it followed by taking it home for the pot.

We were permitted to fly Kites once the Second World War was over, for during this period in time it was forbidden, so kite flying on very windy days was quite popular, from ordinary kites to Box Kites, we made them from out of thin strips of cane or timber, and covered them with brown paper, some we painter eyes or such likes upon them, we would buy many spools of string in order to get them to fly as high as we could, one day while flying our kite Mr William Howard came and shot it down with his shot gun due to it frightening his pidgins from coming back to the loft on the days he was racing them, there was never a dull moment.

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Hot lazy summer days it would be up to the canal sailing homemade boats along with paddling or swimming in it, or we would go train spotting and marking of the trains and their numbers off that were in our Allan Train Spotters Books that we had for Christmas or Birthdays.

Another pastime was trolley or scooter racing down some of the hills in the Bugbrooke area, at times one could get to the brook bridge down Church Lane from off the top of Butts Hill, riding on a four wheeled trolley that consisted of four pram wheels and a plank of timber to sit on, the same was from off the top of Camp Hill occasionally one could get down into the West End of the village, the most hairiest ride was down birds hill if you were brave enough to start from the top and get down and around the bottom right handed bend at the bottom one sailed over the railway bridge and canal and at times could reach the top of Camp Hill and onwards either down towards the west End or straight down the high Street, but wind direction and conditions were a controlling factor as well as the ability to stay on whatever contraption, I did once set off from the top of Birds Hill following a motor car on a scooter and was to overtake the thing before I was half way down and still accelerating it was just like being on fathers motorbike at speed with the wind and vibrations from the rough roadway, I did stay on without coming off or trying to slow down flying up and over the two bridges of the railway and canal and onwards it was very exhilarating experience for me as a young boy.

Years later when me and Malcolm had a bicycle each, we would ride as fast as we could along Scurf Lane towards Birds Hill as fast as we could peddle, before reaching the top of the steep gradient, then we would slip stream one another while racing all the way down at great speeds, with the wind tearing through our hair and clothing, the thought of getting hurt in anyway never entered our heads as it was such good fun and exhilarating for us both at the time.

Making and flying paper aeroplanes was one pastime, another of making Cap Bombs from a nut and two bolts and a length of string, we would break the red from off red matches to put between the two bolts and nut, what made a resounding bang when coming down and hitting the roadway to our delight, we did have cap guns or cowboy outfits for Christmas etc, of one cap gun I still have about amongst my collection.

On hot sunny days Bugbrooke Wheel Pits was another destination where many families congregated to paddle about in the brook, or to try and catch many of the small types of fish etc that swam in its waters, a favourite pastime was damming it up from bank to bank and holding the water back until it finally broke through with quite a rush.

In later years we did this at the old sheep dip in Captains Close, by cutting planks of wood that Millards the company who laid the sewer in Bugbrooke had left laying about, we cut them to lengths and slid them down into the groves within the brickwork until the water reached the top of the banks upstream, whereby one man who lived upstream though that the water may have reached and got into his home was to give us short thrift and a smack around the head, we were quickly made to remove it before the water got any higher !

At one time we had two very large planks of timber that we could punt our way back and forth along the brook that ran under the canal bridge at the Aqueduct, until the floods came and washed them well down stream.

Homemade rafts were to be quite common to go along the canal on, as well as fishing along its banks, or looking for Moorhens nests for if the eggs were taken early before any chicks had formed they were nice to eat after being fried up in a pan, the same was for duck eggs that nested along the banks of the brook or in the top bushy parts of the old willow trees.

Another pastime was with a long willow pole, to play propping as it was called that was running and placing the pole in the centre of the stream and pole vaulting over it onto the opposite bank, if and when you got it wrong one got a soaking to everyone's amusement.

Autumn bought the season for collecting Conkers that we would bore a hole through followed by a leather bootlace, we would spend hours of fun knocking each other's conkers to bits, some time a conker could outlast two or three bouts, some even six, but through all the bashing about they split apart just like all the others.

With the Autumn season we were encouraged at school to go out and collect the many Rose Hips from off the hedge rows, we were paid three pence a pound when taking them to school, sack after sack were collected over the weeks, and on doing so we were given badges for those who collected the most, the same was for collecting blackberries, as we were told it all helped the war effort, this we did even when it was over.

September October time the butchers in Bugbrooke started killing pigs for winter food, we were permitted to watch this done for after the pig was shot and bled, they wrapped it up in straw to burn all its hairs off, when doing so it cooked the meat within its trotters, so when starting to cut and hang the pig up the butcher would pull off the pigs trotters, whereby we would pounce upon them and eat the meat from out of them with relish, as well as being given its bladder that we would shove a strong piece of straw down into it so as we could blow it up like a football, when doing so it was tied off and hung up to dry, that would give us hours of fun kicking it about until it burst, when this occurred they had a peculiar smell about them!.

There would be collard head made from boiling its head up in a large pot followed by pouring the remains into a bowl and being compressed into it by the use of a small plate with a weight on it, it was lovely when set with all the meat and jelly, whiskers and all, yum yum yum.

Also chittling pies from its innards, Pork pies from other parts, not counting all the blood that was collected to make black puddings and Faggots etc from out of it, there was nothing wasted everything would be eaten.

Stanley Joseph Clark.