

Transcript of tape from Mr Gordon Copson, who served in the Royal Navy in WW2 and whose parents kept the Bell Inn for the year '44-45.

Some paraphrase, some direct quotes.

'My connections with Hythe started in February 1944' when on leave from the navy he visited Hythe with his father, who on doctor's advice had been advised to leave London. They came down by train, and went to look at the Bell 'at the end of town'. 'Having looked at it, he decided he liked what he saw and we then went back to town. I then went back to my ship. Father and Mother carried on with negotiations to take over the tenancy. The Bell was owned by Mackeson's brewery and the man in charge at that time was a Commander Finlay (?spelling). Everybody was satisfied and a Easter 1944 they took over th tenancy.' Their names were Alfred and May Copson.

The pub was different then. Three bars. RH from road. the lounge. At the front a small snug, and an L shaped bar round the side. The present car park was a garden, on the opposite side of the lane was a nursery run by Elaine and her son, Wiltshire.

Regulars included a retired policeman 'large and stately' called Peerman, and an actor Leo ??? who in a 'flamboyant style sported a 'broad brimmed hat'. Another regular was Babs Tattersall (a bank manager's wife who was 'great fun'. Another couple were the Savages who kept a fruit shop in the High St. He was in the RAF. There was an 'old rogue', nicknamed 'Cocker', whose face was like 'uncooked liver' and who was so objectionable that he was permanently banned from the pub. A day time regular was a 'lady' who came in. Mr Copson believed she was one, - who had a 'couple of snorters' each day and always finished with a peppermint. Described as 'a rather charming lady'

There were British (AA gunners) and American soldiers as well, who were 'frequent visitors'

and there was never any trouble between them, and 'quite a pleasant time was had' The Americans were generous and open handed, and at Thanksgiving provided turkey. When Mr Copson was coming on leave a parcel 'full of exotic foodstuffs, which had not been seen since before the war' appeared.

After D Day 'when quite a few of our American friends had gone away we were sad to hear that some we had known and liked had not made it, and we owed them quite a debt of gratitude. The Americans, as my memories go, made a very good impression on Hythe as a town'.

After the invasion during a week end leave, Mr Copson watched with his girlfriend over a night and a day the flying bombs as they were attacked. 'First by fighter planes over the sea, then by the enormous battery of AA guns which were sited near Hythe, and those that got passed were attacked again by aircraft. Quite an impressive and frightening episode and in some ways I would have been safer at sea. If one walked through the street there was such a quantity of anti-aircraft shell splinters coming down that it was almost manditory that you wore a steel helmet. Otherwise you were in physical danger of being injured by the pieces that came down.

Christmas 1944, on leave after a Russian convoy Mr Copson joined a very good family reunion. His girlfriend had leave a from the ATS and also an uncle who was in the army and a cousin from the marines. After a good Christmas lunch, as restrictions had been relaxed, they walked down Twiss Road and then along Princes Parade to Seabrook before retracing their steps back to the Bell.

Boxing Day. Girl friend, and cousin had to go back and father and uncle went to Folkestone to see the traditional football match, while he stayed with 'quietly' his mother at the pub, 'celebrating well if not wisely'. Next morning at 4.00 he took Newman's coach up to Sandling station to return to his ship in Scotland. Unfortunately, in his post Christmas haze he picked up an empty suitcase and left all his kit in Hythe -until he came back in March of 1945.

March 1945. Best man at his sister's wedding to a RSM at St. Leonard's Church. Taken by Canon Newman. Walked with his future brother-in-law, Chris, to the church. Reception held at the Light Railway Hotel(?) and then back to the Bell for further celebrations. (See memory 39 Rem)

April 1945. At leave became engaged to his wife, Dorothy. Bought ring in Folkestone, having travelled there by East Kent bus with wooden slatted seats, which made 'quite an impression'. Family celebrations, as spirits were in short supply, were in new local brew known as PA1 Bitter.

Walks through the town took Mr C to two other hostelrys, the Red Lion, (publican Lilian Rudge) or the Duke's Head (Dot and Bob Gifford), over the Bailey Bridge back along the canal bank to The Bell.

There was dancing at the Institute, to a 'small live band' (no drink there), and the pictures at the Ritz, a 'fairly modern cinema' at the bottom of Station Road, or, down a 'back road' to the wooden building (called the Essoldo?) which didn't show pictures every day, but 'it made a change from going to the Ritz, or into Folkestone'. Other walks took him to 'the paper shop on the left hand side' of the High Street, or to 'other places of refreshment of which Hythe was definitely not short'.

August 1945. His parents moved to the Guildhall Hotel in Folkestone. 'With a certain amount of sadness we spent an afternoon and evening packing into tea chests and boxes' his parents belongings which were going into storage. 'I was going to the Far East'. The following morning with a 'bit of a hangover and some sadness I said Farewell to Hythe'.

June 1946 'Equipped with a^o very heavy sun tan and a lot of gifts I returned to be demobilised to Folkestone', where he lived with his by now, wife, until 1951 until they moved to London to live. Meanwhile they visited Hythe frequently, and since leaving the area have continued to do so. Hythe 'always has a soft spot in my heart but I can't get used to the changes which have taken place. It's not the Hythe that I knew.'