



‘Memories of West End’ - Richard Devonshire

As part of West End Village Society’s ‘Memories of West End’ project, Richard Devonshire discussed his memories with Mike Underwood and Guy Consterdine on 8 September 2026. The conversation was recorded. This document is an edited summary of the discussion.

Very sadly, Richard died on 14 October 2026. This memoir stands as a memorial to a notable man who was well known around the village.

The text below is Richard’s own words. He was very pleased with the draft memoir, but unfortunately, he did not have time to make any final comments or corrections.



Richard on 8 September 2026

Parents and grandparents

I was born on the 5th of July in 1956 in Kettlewell Hill Nursing Home in Woking, a large black and white building. It’s now a care home.

My parents were Cyril Devonshire and Joan Wallace. Joan’s father, known to me as Grandpa, was Fred Wallace. Granny Wallace came from Thorpe, over by Chertsey.

During the First World War Grandpa Fred served in the British Army but he got captured at Kut al-Amara in Iraq. He was a prisoner of war for two years and came home

late in 1920 on release. He suffered from beriberi. Meanwhile Granny Wallace worked, earned money, and saved money up.

With the money my Gran had saved, they bought the bit of land in West End next to the blacksmith's that had just been opened. They built a house, Holly Bank, on the land where the Holly Bank cul-de-sac is now.

My Mum, born in 1926, went to West End School when Mr. Bradbrook was the headmaster. He was there in 1919 when the first aircraft flew over West End. Mum left school at 14 in 1940 to work at Benham's grocery shop.

My Dad was born in 1923 and worked for Chobham Mill, just behind where the Co-op is now. He used to drive the lorry for the mill, and he'd drive up to West End. That's how he met my Mum.

During the war, my Dad was in the Ardennes Forest in late 1944, and there he met Percy Wright, from Streets Heath, West End.

I grew up in Chobham, in Grosvenor Road. We used to walk to West End on Wednesday afternoons and Sundays to see Grandpa and Grandma. We used to come up from Grosvenor Road up Scotts Grove Road and Beldam Bridge Road.

I stayed at Chobham till I was 5 years old, when I moved to West End.

Living at Holly Bank

In West End we lived at Holly Bank. There were two bungalows: a big bungalow called Holly Bank where Grandpa Wallace lived, and a small bungalow in the front that was let out. We lived with Grandpa for a while, then he sold some of the land, and on that land, they built a bungalow next to Poplar Cottages. We moved to the bungalow so Mum could look after her Dad and Grandma. Grandma died in 1961 and Granddad died in August 1962.

My Grandad was rich. Where the blacksmith's was, there was a pond that was just part of Grandpa's garden, coming down to the house. The house itself sat basically in the middle of where the Holly Bank estate is now and the back of it had a big paddock that went right back and touched Meadow Way. He sold the land, and they built the new flats in the 1960s.

I remember turning out the pigs when I was about five years old, and I remember we had a bath in the kitchen. Yeah, it wasn't modernised. When Grandpa died, the land was sold to Clarks of Woking for £10,000, and they all got £3,333 each - my Mum and her two brothers.

On Sunday afternoons, we used to have two walks: one was up Rye Grove (we knew it as Henderson's) and one was Hook Mill Lane. My parents walked a lot, doing the West End walks up to Cooper's Hill or the Long Walk to see King Charles on his horse.

When it came to playing, we'd walk up to New England Hill, you know the Dips near Wynterbee's, over to Cuckoo Hill and Greyspot Hill, where the grenade range is now. You could see a beautiful view before the army fenced it off. I was a very studious person myself, reading books. I never went to parties much, I don't know why, that's how I got on.

Creating the recreation ground

He was quite the expert, my Grandpa. He was looked up to in the village. After the First World War he was a greenkeeper at the West Hill Golf Course. He went there when they first built West Hill Golf Course in 1925, and he worked there from 1936 to 1956, for twenty years.

Before the Second World War there was no recreation ground. The land was all common land, heathland – Street's Heath. The Council came to see Fred because Fred was a greenkeeper and they asked him to drain the heathland and work on it. They couldn't afford to drain it, so they just said "Cover it with grass." That's why in the corner there was always a great big puddle because they didn't drain the ground properly. It was only one section that was grassed down, west of a line from the church to near the entrance to Meadow Way. Later, in the 1960s, they cleared the rest of the common to make the rec as it is today, and Tringham Hall came along in 1981.

Schools

I went to school at West End in the original primary school where the Tringham flats are now. I started off with Mrs. Rose, and then Miss Hobbs, and Mrs. George, who drove a little bubble car. Mr. Radford was the headmaster.

I got put in the maypole dance, but I couldn't skip, so I had to practice near the school. But when Mr. Harris came he got rid of the maypole.

After Holy Trinity, we had a choice between Chobham School or Knaphill School, and eight of us went to Chobham. We were taken to and from school by Martin's coaches of Brentmoor Road in a 1930s coach. Reg Craig was the driver. Mrs Martin had budgies and birds in the front, didn't she.

My sister Elizabeth went to London with the Church of England Children's Society. She was selected with a boy from Bisley to go and meet the Princess at Westminster. She was chosen because Mrs. Willis, the school secretary, liked her.

They closed Chobham School in 1970 and we were the first to go to the new school in Horsell, still on Martin's coaches.

Work

Heading towards to Chobham, I used to do my first job soft fruit picking with Mr. Small. You know, Mr. Small, at Homeland. It's a big house.

I left school in 1972 when I was 16, and I went to work at the Co-op in Knaphill. My wages were £10.10 a week during my probation, and then from the 5th week, £10.84. I gave my mother £3 housekeeping and saved £5 a week in the building society. I stayed there till I was 21 then I worked at the butcher's shop opposite the Crown (now the fish and chips shop) for three years. After that, when I was 24, I went to Boots to work in the storeroom. Later I joined the Post Office as a postman in West End, working with Keith Brooking. I got to know everyone in the village.

West End residents

As a little boy, I'd cross the road in the evening to get my evening paper from Vic Berry. Vic Berry's shop was something to be seen, the counter was made of orange boxes, wooden boxes, with just a room behind it. He had a few tables and chairs as a café because in the '40s and '50s, that's where the West End bus used to turn around. They used to go around the war memorial, and the two-man crew would change there and get a cup of tea.

Bob Gosden told me that for the 1935 Silver Jubilee celebrations he was dressed in a sailor outfit, and they had a parade around the village. He was a character, wasn't he? There were so many Gosdens that they used to be called by their first names in the Club. You had Mrs. Bert in the High Street, then there was Mrs Ben, and Mrs. Stan where West End Garage is now. I knew them by their first names, not Gosden. In the Club membership list in the 1940s there was a whole page of Gosdens.

Frank Gosden used to live in the Council Cottages in Windlesham Road. He had a dark blue Bedford flatbed truck and used to do haulage and transporting stuff.

And cars were very rare in those days.

Jack Gosden, a lifelong bachelor, lived at 3 Ford Road. He worked for Glaziers.

There was Lenny Ham next door to the blacksmiths, then Ted Archer. There was Mrs. Dorrell and Mrs Cox. Joan Ansel lived next door to the Underwoods, on the other side from Mrs. Bert Gosden and her son Peter. And there was a brother, Jed Gosden who married Nurse Arthur. He took on Frank at the post office for a while. My Mum told me all these memories years ago.

There was Mr. Frank Allen and his two sisters next to Vic Berry's. Then Henry Street, and then a little track on the other side, opposite Poplar Cottages, which is a public path now.

There was a bungalow where Mike Reed lived - the DJ Mike Reed from Talking Pictures.

Down Brentmoor Road, there was Mr Tillier, who ran a kennels. He was a bit of a miser by all accounts! Opposite Martins there were Mr and Mrs Punter, who kept chickens and sold eggs from their front door.

Then there were the Giles brothers who lived up by New England Hill. They owned a steam traction engine, which they drove up and down the grass path beyond where John Holmes lived and kept it in their back garden. They brought it to the fete one year and gave rides up and down Streets Heath!

A John Giden used to live down Brentmoor Road. He was Master Sadler to the King. He had the Royal Warrant. He was a Sunday School teacher alongside Rev Davis. He came round and said that I'd done really well, and he wanted me to be in the Church. I was a Sidesman once and an altar boy with the wine and water. I got to ring the bell as well!

Bertie Batt was a bit before my time but had a cycle repair shop down Brentmoor Road. I was told that during the war he would charge people's radio batteries, or accumulators as they used to call them.

My Uncle John married Doris Cheeseman, and they lived in Rounce Lane, in a house that was much smaller than it is now!

Next door to the Cheesemans were the Chaplins and the next house was Alandale – where Violet Grey and her grandson Alan lived.

There was Nicholas Smale, and he married the chauffeur lady. And Mr. Smale had a really rough time. And she wouldn't use staircases. She had to have a lift.

When Mr Davis, the vicar, left in 1974, we had to go to Bisley church, because my Mum was a churchgoer. I was 16 and I didn't know where Bisley church was. My mother's world was in West End. The world was that small. They didn't know the next village hardly. The world was West End.

Italian prisoners of war dug the ditch along the stream between Lucas Green Road and Newbridge. There were quite a few Italians in the camp back then.

Shops and travelling salesmen

Tradesmen used to deliver door-to-door. George Nicholls, from Grimditch and Webb in Chobham High Street, used to deliver meat in a cane basket on Saturday afternoon, and Harry Richardson came around with his vegetable truck.

Then, of course there was Mr Medhurst, who sold fruit and veg from his shed in Streets Heath.

I used to go down to Glaziers, the one next to West End Garage, and get tomatoes. Bob Glazier, he was married to Phil Fuller from Knaphill. She used to go and get the tomatoes in brown bags.

I remember the corner shop and newsagent on the corner where the High Street and Streets Heath meet. It was run by Mr Gibbs, then Mr Stratton, then Mr Shiv the elder, and finally his son, till the shop closed.