

## **South Darenth, Kent - mostly in the sixties**

I moved from Plumstead, London in 1959, with my parents and brother, Alan, to South Darenth.

South Darenth is a village about 5 miles from Dartford one way, and looking towards the A20 and Farningham and Eynsford in the other direction. The village is in the Darent Valley, mostly on a hill, with Farningham Road and Sutton-at-Hone Railway Station up the other side. It is well known for the viaduct crossing both sides. On a Sunday morning we would stand, like the railway children, and wave as the The Golden Arrow steam train, the boat train, went by. In the late 30s Ghandi travelled on the Golden Arrow to Victoria, London.

The River Darent runs through at the bottom of the valley, and there are fishing lakes on both sides.

It had a paper mill, famous for its chimney which could be seen for miles. Quite a few of the locals worked at the mill.

There was also a boys home, which is now a retirement village.

South Darenth is linked to Horton Kirby, as the local primary school and the Norman Church, St. Mary's are there. Vic and I married at St. Mary's in 1969, and lived four doors up from my Mum's bungalow. My brother married a year later and lived down the road.

The village hall and its field is between the two villages. A lot of activities took place there, with several annual events looked forward to, such as the village fete, the W.I. pantomime, and the London Welsh choir. St. Mary's also had a church fete.

South Darenth also has 3 pubs, and there is a couple more in Horton Kirby.

A lot of the locals were related either by blood or marriage, and had various nicknames. Jack Gas worked for British Gas, and Jack whiskers had a notable moustache. The Scotts had several sons, and when a daughter arrived she was known as Mary, Queen of Scots. The local doctor really was called Dr. Watson.

The local chapel was run by June and Keith Smith. Keith ran a haulage company and used to take us young people on the back of his lorry to the various seaside in Kent. He had to stop though, something to do with insurance.

The fire station was manned by retained firemen and a war-time siren would go off when there was a fire. The men would appear from houses and the paper mill, with people standing at their doors cheering them on. Once when my brother's friend had cycled from Woolwich to visit, he went outside and said his bike had gone. Alan said he would find it outside the fire station, and that's where it was.

When the possible options for the high speed train link routes were proposed, South Darenth was one of them. An Action group was formed and a march held

in 1989. My Mum made a badge saying BR Off. BR offered to buy properties and my Mum and brother sold theirs. Vic and I had already moved. In the end the route was not chosen, but the damage to the community had been done.

Later the mill was closed and a housing estate built. The mill chimney was shortened for health and safety reasons, and now there is talk of demolishing the rest of it. The roads are now full of cars, but apparently there is a nice Co-Op.

The Parish Council produced a book in 1994, with lots of contributions from the original locals.

Janice Adams