

*Robbie
Remembers*



Robbie Remembers

Robert* James was born on November the 29th 1929 in the Naval Maternity Hospital in Southsea, the first child of Betty and Jim Staley.



Left: Jim Staley (front) with his older brothers.
Right: Betty Anscome before marriage to Jim.

*Robert was known as Bobby back then and remained Bobby until his late twenties. Then for a few months when I first knew him, he was Bob. But ever since he has been Rob or Robbie. So now I can't break the habit of nearly sixty years and he'll be Rob or Robbie.

His father was a marine based in Portsmouth, where the family lived in a rented house. Robbie's memory of his early life there is very hazy, including the birth of his sister, Sheila, when he was three.



Robbie and his mother

However he does remember the family visits to Granny and Granddad Staley who lived on a farm in Buckinghamshire. Among his earliest memories are going shopping to Northampton on the bus with Granny Staley on market day with all the stalls, and sitting on a wooden train and pushing with his feet round the paddock in front of Granny Staley's house (see cover photograph), and playing in the hay barn amongst the hay bales. Robbie loved being there. He would follow his Granddad round the farm, each with their

sandwiches and bottle of cold tea (with milk and sugar).

They went at least once a year and the journey took all day. They had to set off from Portsmouth early in the morning, get the train to Waterloo Station, go across town on the tube to Euston Station, catch a train to Bletchley junction, change trains to Buckingham (there were only two a day), then go from there by bus to Granny Staley's house. This regular trek continued until many years later when the family got a car.

Gibraltar

Robbie was about 6 and had not yet started school when his father was posted to a shore job in Gibraltar. The Gibraltar years (1936-1939) have stayed fresh in his memory. The family stayed with Granny and Granddad Staley in Buckinghamshire for a few weeks in before they left. Robbie's father went ahead to Gibraltar to find a flat and the family followed.

Flat number 5 on Heartbreak Hill was at the end of a row of single-storied flats. Behind the flats were the kitchens. In front looking east across waste ground they could see the sea.

At the end next to no. 5 was the school so Robbie didn't have far to go. He got the strap at least once a week either for being naughty or not speaking Spanish. He could swear in Spanish though. Next door was a Spanish family who had daughter two or three years older than Rob and from her he learnt things that weren't in the school curriculum. He said that he grew up fast in those three years.

Although the people in the services were in most ways isolated from the local community, the school catered for the local

children too.

A Scottish Regiment was based in barracks above the marines and from time to time they could be heard practicing. Then on Sundays they played the bagpipes as they marched to and from church. To this day Rob says the sound of bagpipes reminds him of the time in Gibraltar.

The Services organized much of the social life of servicemen and their families in Gibraltar as it did even in the UK, so it was not such a big change to move back and forwards as it might otherwise have been. One difference from the UK was the weather; it was never cold in Gibraltar. It wasn't too hot either as there was always a sea breeze.



Robbie with Sheila and local guide in Algeria

They were well looked after. Family outings may be arranged, perhaps over the causeway to Spain before the civil war broke out there to have a picnic on the beach, or a ride of an hour or

so on a barge over to Algeria. Games may be organized, and on birthdays there was a party on the only beach on Gibraltar, round past the causeway and the racecourse (the only flat land). At Christmas there was a tattoo on the parade ground and a simulated fight. Rob remembers the soldiers falling down realistically, and when he got home he tried to do that too, and couldn't.

The Spanish Civil war broke out while they were in Gibraltar and Rob remembers watching a Spanish warship firing into Southern Spain at a large building he could see across the water. It was a factory processing cork gathered from the many cork trees there in order to finance the revolution.

On another occasion he woke to see the harbour turned orange. A warship had fired on a cargo ship carrying oranges which covered the surface of the harbour. Everyone went down to the sea and collected sackfuls as they floated ashore with the tide. There was lots of marmalade made in Gibraltar. Rob's family sometimes had boisterous parties and once after a few beers a guest emptied a pot of marmalade over his mother's head! The services offices were in an old French battleship captured in the war in the 19th century. It was a wooden ship with four masts and many single marines lived there.

Back in the UK at Frogmore Road

His father was posted to sea in 1939 before war broke out, and when he left Gibraltar in June, Rob, Sheila and their mother left too and returned to Portsmouth. Rob was nine. They stayed with Rob's maternal grandparents, Granny and Granddad Anscome, in Berty Road in Portsmouth.

Granddad Anscome worked in the navy dockyards. He had been gassed in France in the first World War but apparently kept reasonably good health afterwards apart from his feet. During the war he had been issued boots which were too small for him and he suffered from bad feet ever after because of it. About 3000 people worked in the Portsmouth dockyards, which made it one of the two main dockyards in the UK together with Plymouth.

His father was about 12 months at sea before he was draughted back to the UK because of his special skills. He was based at the Fort Cumberland Barracks in Portsmouth. The reunited family rented a house at 23 Frogmore Road.

His father had permission from the Marines to live at home and had to leave home at 7.30 to be in barracks by 8.00. Their house backed onto the railway yard. It was noisy but they didn't feel frightened because there were no bombs on the yards then – in fact nothing much doing in the UK at the beginning of the war. For Rob it was all a big adventure.

His father was fond of sport and played football and water polo for the Marines. They must have been a hard lot because evidently he had learned to swim in a hurry when the marines threw him into the water and he had to either swim or drown. There was a football ground at the bottom of Frogmore Road. The football Club colours were blue and white and Rob's father and mother and her father (Granddad Anscome) would go along to the end of the street to watch the game. His father took a box, wrapped up in brown paper and tied with string to look like a parcel, for Rob's mother to stand on so she could see. She would stand on her box and hold onto the rail in front of her with her husband standing in front of her. They always stood in

the same place, the 'boilermaker's hump', where the boilermakers and their mates gathered. On one notable occasion the crowd was getting worked up and everyone started yelling 'Kick it, kick it ' and Rob's mother got so excited she kicked furiously right into the back of her husband's knee. He hobbled for days.

Rob sometimes went with them to the football but he preferred to go with Sheila over to Granny Anscome's house about fifteen minutes walk away in the centre of town, and after lunch walk to the Regent picture house which only took five minutes. Three pence to get in and a penny for a gobstopper. Nancy and Peter, their cousins might go with them.

Granny Anscome's special treat was homemade lemonade. She also endeared herself to the children by playing cards (often snap) with them, or overseeing their games of patience.

Granddad Anscome did the football pools and Rob's mother gave her father some money each week to do a few lines for her. In 1940 while living in Frogmore Road she struck it lucky and won 800 pounds.

Buckinghamshire

Later in 1940 Rob, Sheila and their mother went to Buckinghamshire to help Granny Staley who had broken her arm. Granny Staley lived in a rented house on a farm where Granddad Staley was a herdsman responsible for milking the cows. He had not been sent to war in 1914 because he was needed at home on the farm.

Their house was one of two joined together. A farm labourer with 4 boys older than Robbie lived in the other.

Life could not have been easy for them on the farm with only oil lamps and a coal range because there was no electricity. Water had to be boiled for making tea or doing the dishes or baths – for everything. And Granny Staley had been a smartly dressed city girl before she was married. Granddad Staley had met her in London when he went from the country to an Agricultural Show. At that time she was head housekeeper in a big house. Maybe she didn't know about the lack of electricity then. Anyway they were married and Rob said she coped admirably because she was a very good strong determined woman. Rob reckons his Granddad got a bargain!

Granny Staley was his favourite grandparent, partly because he didn't see so much of her as he did his Anscome grandparents so she had novelty value, but also because she made parsnip wine in a barrel and would half fill a bottle with her wine, top it up with water and give it to him all for himself. This was real adult stuff when you were ten.

They stayed in Buckinghamshire for about 6 months during which time Rob and Sheila went to the local school; the same school that their father had gone to. It was a real country school – only two classrooms and a big bowl of vegetable soup for each child for lunch. There was also steamed pudding at least three days a week. That winter there was a big snow fall and their Granddad got a horse from the farm stables, put both children on behind him and took them across the two paddocks between the house and the main road. From there they had a half hours walk to school. The snow brought other excitements; Rob and Sheila made a wall of snow (their 'fort') between the two houses. The boys next door made one too and they lobbed snowballs at each other. Rob loved life on the farm. The bombing of Portsmouth began when they were there.

Meanwhile their father stayed in Portsmouth and lived in barracks where he worked as a mechanic.

Porchester

After this sojourn in Buckinghamshire they went back to a new house in Porchester which their father had bought while they were away, with the winnings from the Football Pool. It was brand new with 3 bedrooms, one of the first on farmland being developed into a housing estate. When war came the development stalled which meant that the Staleys had a lot of vacant land around them.

Rob's father still had permission to live at home but now he had to cycle 14 miles into the barracks to work. Sometimes he was on night duty and had to stay in barracks over night.

When the air-raid siren went the family went under the stairs or ran to the nearest air-raid shelter five houses down the street.

After about a year the Government gave them a steel cage called a Morrison Shelter which was installed in the dining room in place of the dining table. It was about the height of the table, and mattresses on the floor enabled Rob and Sheila to go to bed there. Their parents could join them if there was an air-raid. At these times his father would often roam around looking for incendiary bombs. They were about eighteen inches long with a fin on one end and filled with a chemical that ignited on impact. They came in clusters of about 6. The Staley family had two in the garden but none in the house. His father shoveled soil on them and someone came and took them away. Families were given a Morrison Shelter but other people had to race along to the nearest air-raid shelter which would, however, never be more than a block away. Only some of these were

underground. The others were made of bricks 3 - 4 bricks thick. Inside the bricks continuous long steel rods reinforced the wall ceiling and floor and were bound together half way up the wall, making a steel cage. The entrance was protected by a brick wall. After the war ended it took a long time to demolish the air-raid shelters. The Morrison shelters were taken away after a few months.

At school the children were divided into groups of five or six. Rob was designated leader of his group and was in charge of getting his group into air raid shelters in the school grounds. This may happen about once a week. Porchester was too far from the docks at Portsmouth to collect many bombs but one bomb fell on a vacant plot five doors down from their house, shattering their roof tiles and windows.

Rob went to High School in Porchester. By this time the daytime bombing raids had stopped, although they continued at night, except when the moon was bright enough to make the bombers fair targets for Allied retaliation. The whole senior school contributed to the war effort by picking up potatoes after the machines had dug them up.

The boys had competitions at school to see who had collected the biggest piece of shrapnel.

During High School he delivered newspapers on a bicycle twice a day. The morning round took from 5am until 5.45.

Apprenticeship

He left school in 1943 when he had just turned 14 and became apprenticed to a building firm (Light Brothers) who did building repairs during the war in Cosham near Portsmouth. He cycled the 10 miles into work with his father during the 4 years

he worked for Light Bros.

Bombing continued right through the war in Portsmouth so builders were in constant demand for repairs. But all the able-bodied young men were at the war so all the builders were old men and young apprentices. Rob became a 'jack of all trades' – one day bricklaying, the next roof repairing, the next taken down to undertaker to make coffins, then plumbing, electrical work, anything. It was a good training for a lad of only 14, and continued until he was fifteen and a half when the war ended.

Many incidents of bomb damage which he helped to repair stick in his mind.

Once a bit of kerb stone was thrown up by a bomb, went through a roof, and was caught in the canopy of a four-poster bed while people were sleeping in it. Another time an incendiary bomb went through a bathroom window, landed in the clothes basket, and set fire to the clothes and the house. A row of terrace houses had a common drain and when a bomb damaged it, the people in the houses up from the damage were asked not to pull the chain of their toilet while it was being fixed. Once someone forgot, and the floor of the bathroom and kitchen where Rob was working was flooded with the contents of their lavatory. The boss on the job was so furious he took to the offending toilet with a sledge hammer.

Broken windows were common. High grade window glass was scarce so lower grade green house glass was used to repair them, and even then only one pane of glass in each room was allowed. Other broken windows were boarded up.

In the months before the Normandy landing the port at Portsmouth was sealed off but Rob remembers seeing boats of all shapes and sizes, landing craft for people and vehicles,

barges, anything that was seaworthy, jammed into Portsmouth harbour. Portsmouth was crowded with troops.

Then one morning boats and men were all gone. That day and for several days after it, the sky was buzzing with Dakotas for paratroops, Lancasters for carrying troops, spitfires, transport planes, Hurricanes, Lightnings (manoeuvrable long-distance fighters with a boom full of fuel attached to each side of the fuselage. These were British design, American made planes toward the end of the war.) The Luftwaffe was nowhere to be seen. Rob said it was hard to concentrate on anything else for looking up at the sky. Everyone waited anxiously for the official announcement expected at the 6 o'clock news.

Leading up to the invasion of Europe tin huts sprouted up all around England on the side of country roads. These huts were about 25-30 feet long with curved corrugated iron roof forming both roof and sides, and were full of ammunition of all sizes. These too gradually disappeared after June '44.

Hayling Island off the coast of Portsmouth was the site of construction of concrete barges which were floated across the channel and sunk to make moorings for ships during the invasion.

After this invasion the rockets began. You could hear them coming and see them too if they were in your area. When the noise stopped you waited for them to fall. The routine was to start walking along to the shelter when the siren went and if the noise stopped before the rocket passed overhead, to run like hell. They were the 'doodle bugs'. The later rockets which you couldn't hear coming were dropped mainly on London.

Soon after the war, while they still lived in Porchester, Alan was born.

Fawcett Road

In 1946 Rob's father was discharged from the Marines after 22 years service, and they sold their house in Porchester and bought a fish and greengrocers shop in Fawcett Road in Portsmouth. When they bought the shop they inherited a chap who had run the fish side of the business. They kept him on until his unwelcome familiarity with the customers brought complaints, and they had to get rid of him.

Rob's parents worked in the shop as a team; his mother looked after the greengrocery and his father the fish. In addition, his



With Alan at Fawcett Road

father took bets for his brother-in-law's (Frank's) betting shop in Fareham. Frank was married to Rob's Aunty Ede, one of his mother's 3 sisters. They had no children. Aunty Bet was married to a Marine and had 2 children, Nancy and Peter (a builder's labourer). The third sister had died young. Rob's mother, Betty (Elizabeth) also had a brother, Uncle Arthur, who was in the Marines. He married Vera, a hairdresser, and had a boy, Tony, and 2 girls. They all lived in the Portsmouth area.



Robbie's father in his shop



Robbie's parents in front of their shop.

Rob's father, Jim (Albert James), was the youngest of four boys; 3 servicemen (2 marines, 1 navy) and the 4th brother worked on the farm. Rob's father joined the marines when he was 18.

Will, the eldest boy, went into the Marines, married, and had one girl. When he left the services they lived in Stoke-on-Trent, where he worked in a company (in unknown capacity). The next son, Harry joined the navy. He married and had two boys, Ron and Gerry, and two girls. Gerry did a course in engineering and bought a car in which Rob went joy-riding with him after he left school. Gerry was older than Rob but had very short legs and only came up to Rob's shoulder. Ron was a mechanic and was in charge of the engine room in a torpedo boat during the war. The family lived in Portsmouth and their house was destroyed in the war.

The third son, Fred, was married with four children. They lived in Akeley and he drove a milk wagon.

Granddad Staley died just after the war and Granny Staley went to live in a council house in the village of Akeley which was only about half an hour's walk from the farm she had lived on for years. Rob's family would drive up to see her in their delivery van on long weekends. The van was the first car they possessed. Up until that time they'd made the journey by public transport – a tiresome journey which Rob remembers so well. Phillip was born into the house in Fawcett Road. Alan and Phillip were like a second family.

The ATC

Aged 14 to 18 Rob was in the ATC (Air Training Corps) which was part of the Air Force. One evening every week he went to

the drill hall for lectures covering aircraft recognition and general duties, and very importantly to Rob, band practice. He played the side-drum and bugle in the band. (The bass drum didn't appeal to him so much.) His uncle was at that time in the Royal Marine's Band also playing the side drum and bugle. Once a month, on a Sunday morning, the band marched for about half an hour through the town, playing all the way, to the Southsea Common on the waterfront. Rob continued playing in the band until he left for Germany. When he returned to the UK he was never in one place long enough to join a band, and he has never played since.



Robbie in the front row of the band.

The ATC organized training camps for a week 2 or 3 times a year at an air force base, and there they may occasionally have a ride in a plane. Once Rob went to a camp at a flying boat base and went on a Sunderland when it went out looking for submarines.

Plainly the time in the ATC had its perks. Not only rides in

planes but Rob had access to ammunition and he acquired a few live rifle bullets. They were about 4 inches long with the propellant in the back end, and he had great sport fixing the bullet's back end in a vice, putting the point of a nail in the firing pin and belting it with a hammer. If aimed correctly the bullet went into the ground. There were no casualties anyway.

Compulsory Military Service

He was deemed to be semi-trained, so it was natural that he was drafted into the Air Force for his two years compulsory military service when he turned 18.



Robbie aged 18 in Air Force uniform

Initially he spent a few weeks just outside Blackpool doing basic vehicle training. Then for a few months he became the personal chauffeur of the boss in a training camp in Andover. After this he chose to go overseas and was sent to Bad Elsen in Germany where the headquarters of the airforce were. This small village was untouched by war. He became the

driver of a small vehicle delivering Government Service mail all over Germany and as far afield as Holland and France.



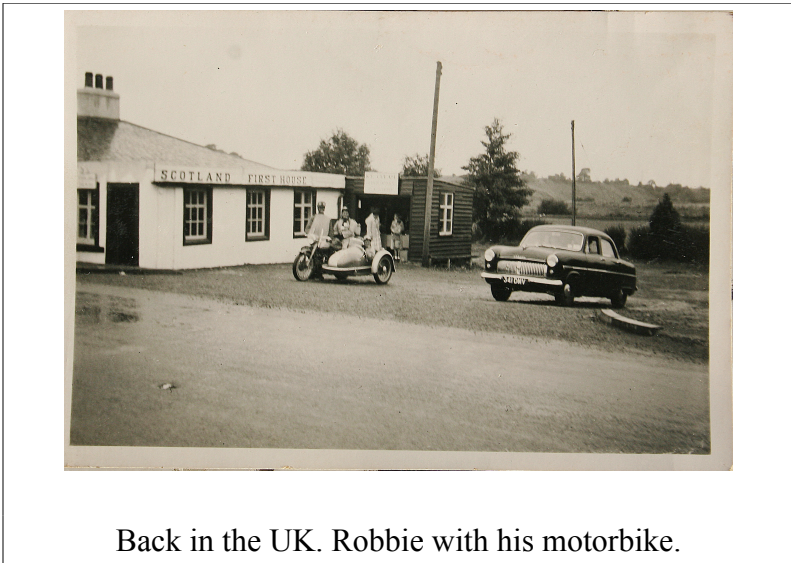
Robbie with his VW in Germany

Occasionally there would be a special delivery, for instance the time some top brass chap from Hamburg visited Headquarters and left his hat behind. Rob had to drive all the way to Hamburg in his little Volkswagon beetle to take it back. Another special delivery was driving the American Liaison Officer based on their base at Bad Elsen down to the American Headquarters further south. The liaison Officer obviously fancied a few days off and arranged with a friend of his in transport down there to 'fix' Rob's VW which Rob thought was running fine. So Rob and his 'special delivery' had a few days

holiday while a whole new engine was put in. Apparently the Americans had stacks of new VW engines commandeered from the Germans. In fact the Americans had stacks of everything Rob said. A lot of VWs returned to America with the home-bound troops.

Once Rob was sent to Berlin to deliver documents. The VW was no use because there was no access by road. So Rob flew in one day on a transport plane, and out the next. This was enough time to see the destruction.

Rob stayed in Germany for about 18 months. Altogether he spent just over 2 years in the Services. He could have signed up at the end of this time but although he enjoyed the Services he chose to return to the building trade in the UK because he would have more independence.



Back in the UK. Robbie with his motorbike.

Back in the UK

Back in Britain after discharge from the airforce, he bought a motorbike and got a job working for the Havelock Aircraft Company. But he was put into the office which he didn't like, so he got another job fitting out a bank where a friend was the foreman. This was his first joinery job. Then he got a job in Aldermaston doing concrete work. He didn't care for this so went down to Reading on his motorcycle and worked at Samuel Elliot and Sons. doing outside work fitting a shop for 8 weeks. Shop fittings were manufactured back in the factory and Rob was one of a team who installed them and because Rob had no ties and so was mobile he found himself on the move all the time, travelling all over the country installing Samuel Elliot's shop fittings. They were often under pressure to finish the job so the shop owner didn't lose too much custom. In particular Rob remembers a Gent's Outfitter in Regent Street who wanted the job finished over a weekend. So they started on Friday morning and worked in shifts right through the day and into the night, (sleeping in makeshift beds in the basement) and finished on Sunday night.

Another interesting job was fitting out the first class cabins of an ocean liner in Glasgow for 6 weeks.

Work was never boring as each job was different and he constantly met new people. He remembers often singing on the job to the entertainment of the customers.

New Zealand

Rob was now 27 and had been thinking for some time of coming to NZ or Australia. After reading in the paper of the

\$10 passages offered to NZ he decided on NZ, but intended to move on to Australia and then to Canada.

Just before he left for NZ Sheila married John who was in the army. He was posted to Germany for 2 years and when they returned to the UK he left the army and became a driving instructor in Portsmouth. They had 2 children, Deborah and John.



Robbie with friends on the 'Captain Hobson'.

He left for NZ on the 'Captain Hobson', a small boat which had been a hospital ship during the war. There were 300-400 passengers. He had to stay in NZ for 2 years. The journey took about 6 weeks and as the weather was mostly good, Robbie often slept on deck. The boat came through the Panama Canal and then stopped at Pitcairn Island before reaching Wellington

where he spent 2 nights on board and visited the Houses of Parliament. Then he took the overnight ferry to Christchurch and the train to Dunedin. It was September. He stayed in a one-man hut in the Transit Camp in Victoria Road where the council houses are now. He got a job immediately at Love Construction making prefab houses.



Fishing from the 'Captain Hobson'.

While in the Transit Camp Rob made several trips to Christchurch to see a girl he'd met in the UK. A short while before he'd left Britain he'd offered a ride to two NZ girls hitch-hiking round the UK. He'd had a week's holiday from his

job in Manchester and was off to Scotland on his motorbike. He put one girl up behind him and the other in the sidecar. He had a tent and they camped around Scotland for ten days – up to Glasgow, to the Isle of Man and back down to Edinburgh where they saw a Tattoo. He had to leave them there and return to resume work in Manchester.

The girls were heading for Germany and Rob had been talking to them about his time there and about the leather shorts he'd wanted and regretted not buying. A short while after his return to work he received a parcel from Germany containing the coveted leather shorts! A thank you gift from the girls.

One of the girls was from Nelson and the other from Christchurch. When he'd first come to NZ and arrived in Christchurch on the ferry, he'd rung one of the girls, and her family had picked him up, given him a cup of tea at their market garden in the Heathcote Valley, and dropped him at the station to get the train to Dunedin. He made several subsequent visits to Christchurch when he was staying in the Transit Camp. These visits stopped after he met Valerie.

From the Transit Camp Robbie went for a walk along Victoria Road and up Bedford Street. At the top of the street a man was working in the garden weeding the bank of 150 Ravenswood Road. I was standing in the driveway.

The man called out to him, 'What do you think? My daughter wants to borrow the car to go to town.'

Rob said, 'If she's got her licence, why not?' My father must have been swayed by this because off I went in the car.

Then Dad said, 'Would you like a cup of tea?'

So Robbie had tea and chocolate cake which he politely said he liked (he didn't particularly) and got fed on chocolate cake thereafter.

In the course of conversation Rob said he was in the building trade and Dad said he was a teacher. When the subject of Dad's plan to build a glasshouse came up Rob offered to help him build it. The wood had to be primed first and then the whole thing put together, and Rob came up every weekend to help. After the glasshouse was finished Rob kept coming. Dad had told Rob he was making brake pads for railway wagons in the workshop he'd set up at the end of the garage but Rob didn't believe a word of it because they were the wrong shape. Robbie smiled as he recounted it. They were actually wooden strips for lavatory seats.

Valerie

Valerie came home a few days before Christmas. Rob came up to our place wearing, he remembers, his German leather shorts, and Dad was talking to Valerie in the garden. He went inside with them for tea, and had chocolate cake – again. A few visits later Valerie said to Robbie that she intended to visit Uncle Algy on his farm in Waimate. Rob had no work at the time and jumped at the chance, offering to take her there on his motorbike. They stayed over a week. He never got to Australia or Canada because he got married in July, some six months after meeting Valerie. Valerie called him Rob or Robbie, and this stuck. So Bobby or Bob was dropped.



Robbie and Valerie's wedding. From left; Dad, Helen Neal, Rosalie Marks (flower girl), Mum, Valerie, Robbie and me. Small girl in front Glenys Neal?

Rob met Dad's brother Graham and made him a mobile table to pull over his bed and put the newspaper as his motor neurone disease progressed. After Graham died, his wife Margaret went to Auckland for a while and Rob visited her there. Rob and Valerie were married then and living in Auckland. They had bought a house in Papatoetoe a block or so from the main street up a right-of-way. Robbie added another wing onto this house and sold it, moving a few streets to a bright 'green pea' house in Colmar Road. They flossied it up and sold it before going back to the UK.



Robbie, Valerie and
flower girl Rosalie Marks

By the time Rob made his first visit back to the UK to introduce his new bride, his father had sold the Fawcett Road house and business and moved into a big 4 bedroomed house in Station Road in Cosham. It had a big garden and in this, together with the big gardens of houses either side of them, Rob's father grew vegetables. He had retained the betting business and taken over the betting shop in Fareham from Frank who had got into difficulties. He ran this for some time and Alan, Rob's brother,

joined his father in the business. It did not interest Rob at all. Alan had gone to Portsmouth Polytech and studied mechanical drawing. After this he'd had a job at the Farnborough Research Centre and then at the Bristol Aircraft Company. But he didn't enjoy mechanical drawing, so he worked with his father in the betting shop for a few years before settling down to a job in an office. He married Ann who worked in her father's variety goods shop (dairy in New Zealand). They had two girls, Lisa

and Sarah.

Philip bussed to a special school for his education. The family belonged to the Spastic Society which had a secondhand shop in Portsmouth. When Philip was older he helped his mother run



Rob's mother, father, and brothers Phillip (front) and Alan

the shop three days a week. The buttons from the clothes too old to sell were cut off and sewn onto cards for sale. Philip was particularly valuable in the shop for lifting and carrying as he was very strong. Rob said to shake hands with him risked having your fingers broken!

On this first visit Rob bought, altered and sold two houses – one in Fontley and another in Portsmouth.

In time the gardens became too much for his parents and they moved again to a smaller property in Drayton, a suburb of Portsmouth. This is where Rob and Valerie stayed on their second trip back to the UK while they built the house in Horndean in Hampshire. We visited them there when we were in the UK on Sabbatical and stayed in the mobile home in which they lived for 6 months while building. We also visited Rob's parents in Drayton. Rob eventually sold this house and



Rob's mother and father in later years

built another in Horndean. While there Rob attended a week's course in London for training scout leaders, an interest he continued later back in NZ. Sam went to Portsmouth Grammar on the train from the stop at Roland's Castle. At the other end he had a 20 minute walk from the train to school. Susie and Michael only had a five minute walk to Horndean School. Rob fitted up a van for sleeping and the family spent every weekend exploring.

They had another work van which they kindly lent to us when Sam became ill just before we left the UK to return to NZ. After Rob and Valerie had returned to NZ from their second trip back to the UK they had word that Rob's mother had died suddenly from a coronary. Rob remembers her as an even tempered woman who nevertheless had simple rules which had to be obeyed. The children had to speak when spoken to, do as they were told and not slump over the table. Retribution for transgression might be a sharp slap, deprivation of treats or, if they were very bad, bed without dinner. She was strict but fair and the children knew where they stood.

When they returned to New Zealand the second time they bought a house in Pinehill, renovated it and sold it, and then moved to Christchurch and bought a section in Cashmere. The beautiful big house which Rob built there (with Valerie as his builder's mate) was sold when it was finished and they moved out to Tai Tapu. Rob built on a big lounge and small conservatory to this place and then sold it to move on to Lincoln.

During his time in Canterbury, Rob sang tenor first in the St Augustine Choir and then in the Garden City Male Choir which took part in a New Zealand Male Voice Choirs Festival in Dunedin in 2001.

They sold the house in Lincoln in 2010, moved down to Dunedin, and bought a house in Glenfinnan Place.

R H Sneyd July 2016



St Augustine choir. Rob back row third from right.



Garden City Male Choir (in red) with massed choir



Robbie
April 2015