**What has been missed from past years?**Memories from R. Toll, ‘the son of Mr.Toll, the builder’  
*Transcribed from original by Helena Rogers, with minor modifications for clarity*

While watching two football teams playing at the same time in the recreation field - watching Sam James *See para 3)* start the engine driving the dynamo at the power station on The Down. The engine charged the batteries that supplied the village with direct current electricity. The iron part had to be heated until it was red hot. It was then was supplied with oil which vaporised, and a valve opened onto the single-cylinder Tangye Engine. At the same time another valve opened from a compressed tank to turn the big flywheel. It caused the gas to fire and this turned the flywheel, which had a long belt that was connected to the dynamo, generating 200 volts. If there was not enough compressed air, the large flywheel had to be helped to turn before it could start.

A bank of wet batteries was accommodated in a battery room. These had a large capacity, but would only last for a short while during the night. The engine was stopped at midnight and the supply would be from the batteries only. If some customers were using heaters during the night, the supply would not stand it, so the supply failed.

This power station was built by Christy and Son of Chelmsford, who later turned the system over to the A.C. current type of electricity when a new power station at Morwellham was built. All of the village had steel poles and all new wiring, taking away the old timber ones. Houses had to be rewired to take the new supply and the old mercury meters replaced with new A C meters. The new A C current was dangerous. It could kill, whereas the D C current would give a nasty shock. When the old power station was made redundant, it was turned into accommodation for Sam and his wife. An office was provided with a shop front facing the road. The electricity bills could be paid at this office.

Many years ago, a Mr. Parrilli – a gent who came over from Italy - started taking ice cream from his factory in Plymouth to Bere Alston. He had a handcart suitable to carry ice cream, which was filled up with ice cream and brought to Bere Alston by train. Mr. Parrilli. changed his name to Lucas, which was printed on the cart. His favourite spot to park was at the top of Cornwall Street. One could buy wafers or cones, also take away ice cream in a glass. He used to supply Rich’s’ Party Field when parties came up by train from Plymouth.

During the summer, a retired gent called Ballard paid for some parties (he built the Ballard Institute at Millbay Road in Plymouth for the use of the children of poor families.) He hired the train to carry all the children to the party field and also provided teas (cream teas and home-made cake etc.), which were set out in the wooden huts on the top of the field supplied by the Rich Family. One could always tell when the train bringing the children was entering the station, because the driver would keep sounding the engine’s whistle. The noise the children made could be heard in the village! But the children would take flowers from private gardens, not knowing these were not for picking.

One of the things missed now is the dockyard hooter and the firing of a gun. This denoted ‘leave work’ time at 5pm, but this was not always heard, due to the direction of the wind. The 5pm and the 6.15 trains were to carry the dockyard workers home. At one time quite a few were employed in the yard. The six-fifteen was the early morning train and was really for the yard workers.

Several years ago, a gent called Harry Cole ran the Victoria Pub in Fore Street, Bere Alston, with his wife*.* Trips were organised to away cricket matches and other events started at this pub. The conveyance was a horse-drawn landaulette with two horses. It used to take most of the teams. There is a photograph existing showing the landaulette with the occupants and driver etc, outside the Victoria pub, ready to set off. Most of the names around the horses have been noted on the rear of the photograph. There were three men standing at the front – one was Harry Cole, the pub’s owner, Mr. Williams and old Jou??

Harry later moved to the dairy at the top of Cornwall Street and Fore Street junction. Harry also ran a conveyance to Bere Alston station with a horse that was named ‘Bluebell’. It got its name from Laura Toll who kept a shop on the corner opposite, selling one of the items known as Bluebell polish. Harry had a loud voice and used to go to the station for the 6am train shouting ‘Come on Bluebell you so and so!’, waking all around the area. On Valentine’s Day my mother had a cardboard advert for Bluebell Polish and sent it to Harry Cole. He told her that he knew who had sent the ‘Bluebell’ advert, but from then on he was always known as ‘Bluebell’ Cole.

The Coles owned a derelict house and buildings in Cornwall Street Bere Alston. It had a thatched roof with a lean-to at the rear. It was a very old building with a thatched canopy over the front door - a stable-type door in two halves. Harry Cole kept his cows at the rear of the house in a corrugated iron building, where there was a trap and stable. The cows were the main supply for the dairy on the corner of Cornwall Street and Fore Street. Around 1920, the old house was demolished and a new one built in its place under the Rural Workers Grant. Mary Cole, Harry’s daughter, did the paper work and employed Messrs Richard and Son to do the rebuilding. The canopy over the front door was replaced with a slate and timber construction. This was constantly being damaged and in the end was not replaced. The Coles owned land and buildings at Kingswell, which is on the road to Denham Bridge. In 1937 the Coles had my dad build a new farmhouse. I was told by Mrs. Cole, the (then) present owner, that the house was built for £800 - looking good to this day. New shippens have been built adjoining the house. Several years ago Harry Cole had a son called Harry living at the corner house in Cornwall Street. He used to help his father after leaving school. My bedroom was opposite his across the road and every morning Harry was constantly told to get out of bed. This went on until his father started to swear at Harry, who in the end DID get out. Sometime after 1937, the property was sold to people called Squance, who farmed Underways Farm. They took over the dairy in Fore Street, carrying on the farming at Kingswell.

I used to like listening to my father relating what it was like in the village when he was a boy. He lived with his grandmother at the house called ‘Mosley House’ in Station Road, Bere Alston. (now No.33) Gran paid for him to attend the boys’ school, which is now the Church Hall. She had to pay sixpence a week for his schooling. I have a photograph of the schoolmaster and all the boys (Dad was amongst the group). All the names of the boys are recorded at the rear of the photo, also the date on a slate held by one of the boys.

Dad explained to me where the main drains ran in the village, as he helped to lay them and build the manholes with white glazed bricks. I have seen one of the manholes with relieving arches etc. It was the work of a good tradesman and perhaps I should not say this, but I did not always agree with his hot temper, which did show sometimes on the rugby field. He played full back for the Bere Alston Rugby Club and was known as ‘Roller Toll’, because he would collect the ball, tuck it in close to himself and roll – making it difficult to hold onto. I have a photo of dad in a group of the rugby team holding the ball. I did get it published in the Tavistock Times some time ago.

Dad was also a fairly good cricketer, making his entrance as a stone-waller to break down the bowling at the start. I used to go with him to rugby and cricket matches in later years when he owned a car that used to take him and the cricket teams to the away matches.

Dad liked his beer, and mum had to lay the law down sometimes to stop him drinking, but when he was made a member of the Freemasons, he gave up drinking altogether, joining the Abstainers and General Insurance Company where only those who did not drink were allowed to join.

Dad learnt his trade with Mr. Brown of Barn Farm, Station Road, Bere Alston, who also ran a mixed farm, dairy, cart hire, coal round and collection and delivery of goods from Bere Aston Station. He had four sons, Fred, the mason, Ambrose the carrier, Arthur on the farm, Joue, who became the Parish Council Clerk in later years. Dad had to help with the milking before going out to work.

Dad went to South Africa, rebuilding the bridges after the Boer War, then in the gold mines rebuilding the furnaces that melted the gold; then working in Cape Town and other cities on building work. *He sent money home* to his sister, Martha, who married Fred Brown. When dad returned home, Fred became dad’s partner. Dad’s idea was that he would speculate in building with the money he had sent home, only to find out that Martha had spent some of it.

At Broad Park Road, Bere Alston, Dad started to build a terrace of houses, only to discover that Fred Brown was spending too much time drinking in The Edgcumbe Hotel. The partnership was dissolved, and Dad went on to build just with his staff and himself. After one or two houses were built, the solid brickwork let in the rain water, so on the advice of an old surveyor, he treated the brickwork on the fronts with boiled linseed oil. This was the cure and he carried on with the treatment with the other houses.

Dad wanted Mum to live in one of the completed houses, but no way would she agree, after the way the Browns had treated Dad and the money – also due to the fact that Martha and Fred were to live in one.

Dad agreed to build a new house for the Congregational minister. This was completed in thirteen weeks with the help of imported tradesmen, but the expenses were above what the Ministry could afford, so it was sold. A Mr.Ernest Paynter bought if for around £900. Another building known as The Manse was built on the opposite side of the road for a cheaper sum.

Dad went on to buy derelict properties and fit them up to sell. He bought 47 Station Road for £70 and carried out a lot of the work in the evenings himself. Then he let it to the Goldsworthy family and later to the Flood Family, who did not look after it. Dad borrowed money on the cottage from his mother, who lived in Louth in Lincolnshire, to do up the two cottages in Cornwall Street, Bere Alston. After the Floods left, Dad spent some money doing it up with a new bathroom etc. I wired the cottage for power and lighting and carried out redecorations, and we moved over from Cornwall / Fore Street around 1934. We also built a new workshop with a two-storey timber and blockwork base. We made a mistake with the roof construction by keeping the tie-beams high, allowing the building to spread, but Dad fixed some iron bars across to hold it in. The reason for high tie-beams were to allow headroom above the bench. Machinery was installed with a second-hand saw bench and mortice machine, which was later to be replaced with new - also adding band saw and radial saws.

Dad used to take the car to the Recreation Field to watch the soccer, as he was getting older and it was further to the field. I was accepted as a U.S.W in the Post Office Engineering Department at Plymouth, later to be transferred to Truro and St. Austell, installing new telephone positions to the existing lodging at both places. Being able to put in several hours overtime I was able to save some money.

I met my wife in Plymouth and we did our courting around the farm at Blanchdown near the River Tamar on the Duke of Bedford’s Estate. After a short engagement, I returned to work for Dad as he was short-handed, but when my wife’s dad died it was uncomfortable for Daisy to live at home on the farm with her mother and brother, so we decided to get married and started living at No.4 Bedford Park, Bere Alston. Diana, our daughter was born at Bedford Park.

It was not long before the second war was declared and I received my papers to join up. On the advice of the officer in the Plymouth Museum where we had to report, I volunteered to join the Royal Corps of Signals at Crownhill Fort, but for some reason I was detailed as a Pigeoneer to look after the pigeons and loft! Later I was detailed for work in the signal office, taking messages and also recording details of incoming messages over the teleprinter. The Foreman of Signals found out that I was an ex-employee of the Post Office Engineering Department as he was taking me around to R.A. Coast Defence Batteries in Cornwall to explain the installation of new communications on these sites. We visited: Looe, Par, Padstow, Newquay and Fowey to carry out this work, with my H.Q at Lanwithan House, Lostwithiel, which was the H.Q. of the 557 Special Coast Regiment. I was also provided with a motorcycle to get to these sites.

It was necessary to attend the battery at any time to rectify any fault that had developed, and I was accepted at the H.Q. by the O.C. He was Lt. Col. Maurice, five-feet tall and bald. We were on quite good terms. Once, when taking my motorcycle home one weekend I passed near the Moorlands Link Hotel and the next morning he asked me if I enjoyed the weekend. He guessed that I did not have a pass signed by his staff - not knowing that I did have one made out by myself from the book of………

*Account unfinished!*