

In 1950 I started to get unsettled, I think it was living in a big town, so whilst on a visit to Lakenheath I was talking to my brother Charles and asked him if there was anything in the village that he thought I could do. Charles had land on which he grew flowers and vegetables, he also had a part share in a greengrocery shop. He told me that the wholesaler who supplied the shop also ran a mobile greengrocery service which he wanted to give up he said he thought that the wholesaler would give this to me if I managed to get myself a vehicle.

I went back to Birmingham and thought about it and decided that yes I would do it. I looked through the adverts in the Birmingham mail and found myself a Luton van for £25. I had done all this when I suddenly thought where were we going to live? I got in touch with my sister Rita and brother-in-law Bill who lived in Brandon, they kindly said that we could live with them until we found somewhere.

I gave in my notice to Mr. Mountford who was most upset and I was sorry to leave him but we parted good friends and I visited him a few times afterwards. I moved all my furniture to Lakenheath in the Luton van and stored it in my brother's shed. Once we were down with my Brother-in-law he helped me to cut out the side of the van and make some sloping racks to display the goods and I was in business. I got the round underway but soon found that accommodation was as hard to find in Suffolk as it was in Birmingham. We were all finding it very restrictive all living together and to make matters worse Margaret was pregnant. I racked my brains and thought why don't I try for a pub, at least this would give me a roof over my head. I wrote to the managing director of Greene Kings brewery in Bury St. Edmunds and told them if they had any pubs to rent I would make a good landlord. I received a reply with a date for an interview for me and my wife, this we kept and we were told they would put our name down on a waiting list and if a pub came vacant we would be considered for it, I told him I had been born and grew up in Lakenheath.

I was in Lakenheath a few weeks later when I met Bill Mackender who kept the Chequers inn, he said he had heard that I was looking for a pub, he had been to the brewery to give notice to leave the Chequers and the Director had asked him if he knew me. He said that he had recommended me and he thought that I would be lucky. I was lucky and so I moved into the pub, it was just a beer house and you had to go down stone steps to the cellar to draw the beer. I was on my way up but I still kept on the greengrocery round.

About 100 yards up the road from my ale house was another pub called the Bull, this was a much larger place and had a full licence. The previous publican had died and his widow stayed on but only opened when she felt like it (which wasn't very often) This pub was also owned by Greene King and I wrote and asked if it would be possible for me to take it over. They said that they would like me in there and had made the widow some very generous offers which eventually paid off and we moved to the Bull whilst the widow had our house as a private residence. Now I was really in business as this pub had potential for a good living, we moved in and I gave up the greengrocery to concentrate on the pub.

In quite a short time I had a good trade going and to supplement my income I had an arrangement with the manager of the war Agricultural Committee that he would bring his small vehicles to me and I would carry out the repairs to them in my back yard.

At the same time as all this was going on the Lakenheath R.A.F. station which housed the American Airforce had been greatly extended and the Americans took it over completely. Fortunately for me the after duty facilities for the Airmen had not been built so when they were not on duty they were looking for somewhere to go. I saw an opportunity and installed a juke box and a bar billiards table, it took off and every night we were heaving, even the locals liked it as they got free drinks. The only snag was that there was still a lot of racial discrimination among the Americans and this led to fights between Blacks and Whites, mostly over women and the women were mostly prostitutes. Some of these girls hung around the camp all the time but others came up from London on the mens pay days. When trouble was imminent I would phone the Air Police at the base and down they would come in their jeep. They would come through the front door and if there was a fight they would unhook their truncheons and hit whoever got in their way. They would sort out the ring leaders pop them in the jeep and take them back to base.

On one occasion there was a fight in the back room and I went through to sort it out. One of the coloured airmen across the other side of the room picked up a half pint beer bottle and threw it, it hit me on the side of the head and smashed. I went down and another airman kicked me in the back of the head, I was out for about a minute, the airman who had thrown the glass was court martialled and sent back to the states.

Although the girls were prostitutes you couldn't help but like them, they would always disappear when trouble started. One in particular called Scottie was quite a character and sometimes the Air Police would take her to Lakenheath station and put her on a train to London. Scottie would get off the train at Shippea Hill which is the next station along the line, get a taxi and be back in the village before the Air Police!

An amusing story about Scotty was, an American Sergeants wife was in hospital and the Sergeant decided to move Scotty in whilst the wife was away, the wife got to hear about this and discharged herself from hospital, she was told that she would find Scottie, either in the Tigers Head a pub in Mildenhall or in the Bull at Lakenheath, first she went to the Tigers Head and Scottie was pointed out to her she waited until Scottie went to the toilet then followed her in, a big fight ensued and Scottie was thrown out of the pub, she caught a Taxi and came to my place and proceeded to tell me the story, saying in a loud voice for all the Americans present to hear "This American Lady used terrible language to me the like of which I have never heard, a coloured American standing nearby took exception to this and said something to Scottie. Scottie immediately set about him and proceeded to use the foulest language that I have ever heard, it ended with a big fight between white and coloured airmen and I had to call in the Air Police.

One day I received a call from the local policeman who told me that the Chief Superintendant and the base Commanding officer would like to come and see me. It was arranged and when they arrived they told me that as there was a lot of trouble in the pub they were thinking of putting it off limits. I told them that this wouldn't solve the problem with the discipline of the men it would just

move it elsewhere, I also told them that it was their duty to sort out the trouble makers and confine them to base or send them back to the States and if they did put my pub off limits I would take it to a higher authority, they left and I heard no more about it.

At this time the Americans were paid in script, this was money that could only be spent on the base or could be exchanged for Sterling in the American Express office on the base. The American Express office closed from midday on Saturday until Monday morning and so during this time the Airmen were unable to exchange their money, being the good Samaritan that I am I decided to help them out at weekends at a reasonable exchange rate. This was totally illegal and of course I needed to be able to change the money back so, I had an arrangement with a couple of Sergeants who did this for me. The only problem arose when they decided to change the script which they did every so often without warning. The men would be called on parade and told that the script had to be exchanged immediately, on two occasions I was awakened at 5 O'clock in the morning by the Sergeants knocking on the door for any script that I had so that they could change it for me.

In addition to changing money I also had a small pawn broking business going and would make a loan until pay day on a watch or a camera. Sometimes on pay day I would have 8 or 9 watches on my arm waiting for redemption, all in all it worked out well and if the goods weren't redeemed there was always a buyer handy.

Although I became friendly with one or two of the Airmen I tried to keep everything on a business basis. One of the Airmen in particular, John McKlinchie was quite a character, one minute he was a Sergeant next a private and next in the stockade, he was a cook and was always broke but he was a lovable rascal. He would turn up in the pub and say that he had no money but plead for a drink, I would help him out and probably the next day another airman would come in with a parcel for me from John. This would contain something like a dozen T bone steaks, I would be worried sick in case the Air Police came in. I remember one day I had a message from John saying that he was in the stockade and that his wife was arriving in Southampton in two days time, he had no money and they wouldn't let him go to meet her unless he could show them that he had enough money to pay the fares for both of them back to the base, would I help him? I did and John turned up at the pub with Shirley his wife, she was as round as she was tall about 4'11" and she really had John under her thumb. In no time she was checking his drinking, giving him no money and generally a hard time, the times I had to cover for him!

The pub was thriving but home life wasn't as good as it should have been and Margaret was pregnant again so it was time for another change. I told the brewers that I wanted to leave and they asked me to stay they even offered to find me a pub in any area that I desired. However my mind was made up and I now had to decide what to do next.

What I really wanted was to get back among cars, a garage or a filling station would be right up my street, I couldn't have picked a worse time, it was 1955 and the petrol companies had decided that it was time that they went 'Solus'

To explain this I must point out that up to 1955 you could call in at a filling station and they would probably sell Shell, B.P. Esso and Cleveland and different brands on the one forecourt and the station would be privately owned.

This meant that the petrol companies were only making small deliveries so they decided that if they bought up the filling stations and put in a manager they could sell only their own brand of petrol. Naturally they bought up all the good sites and could afford to pay a lot of money for them, this made a good filling station out of my price range.

I looked at various sites on the south coast and they were either too expensive or with no prospects. I was in touch with an estate agent in Southsea and one of the things that he sent to me was a Taxi business on the Isle of Wight. I decided to look at this and together with Bill Beale the Lakenheath Vicar went to the Island, I decided to buy and the die was cast. I gave in my notice to the brewery, where I had been a Tenant, business was so good that they put in a manager but the pub went downhill from then on and is now a private house. The rent I had paid for the pub was 14/6 a week 72½p in todays money.