

## Interview with Ray Stone 7<sup>th</sup> December 2012 about the closing of the Meon Valley Railway line.

*David: Hi Ray can you give us some background info on how you know so much about the Meon Valley Railway?*

Ray: Well when the railway line first opened my grandad was one of the first carriers going with a horse and cart to Petersfield three times a week. When the railway opened he was the obvious person to be what they called 'parcels' agent'. Everything, but everything that came to West Meon Station he was responsible for – carting it to ... well most was artificial fertiliser for farms around here ... also the shops had loads delivered – all came down from London and lots of bits and pieces, because everything came down by rail in those days. Grandad started with a horse and cart and moved onto two lorries just delivering around the area.

*David: So how does being a coal merchant fit into this?*

Ray: He .... In 1916 he was in the Old Drum in Petersfield having a cheese sandwich and half a pint for his lunch. A man came in sat down said 'Good morning, what do you do?' Grandad said 'I'm the local carrier – what do you do?' He said 'I'm' ... in those days we called them travellers ... now they are reps aren't they? He said 'I'm a traveller for Rose, Smith and Co – a coal wholesalers' – and said 'where do you come from?' Grandad said West Meon. 'Have you a coal merchant there?' – he said 'yes three but none of them are much cop. So this man said 'Look why don't you ... you've got your horse and cart already – get yourself a pair of scales and weights a couple of shovels and 20 bags – 'cos that's all you can carry ... I'll send you a truck of coal down from London – no the Midlands about 8 tons and you pay me when you've sold it.' Well Grandad was quite an astute businessman and of course in those days you didn't really have anything until you had paid for it – he was a bit cagey ... he said 'Give it a try and see what happens'. Well this truck of coal came to West Meon Station ... I think he sold it in about 4 days and then rang up the co. again and said 'I rather like this idea, can you send me another one ... that went on and on and eventually the business expanded to 3 lorries. Then when Grandad died, the business went to my father and when he died it came to me ... but by my time of course the rail had long since been closed. So you can see that all our lives in the Stone family we seemed to spend half our time up in the goods yard .... Because my earliest memories of dad and his uncles and brothers were of them driving lorries ... so once you came out of school you put some old clothes on and went straight off up the station.

*David: Did you have any other relatives that worked on the railway?*

Ray: Er not on the railway – no ... no. That's the only way we were associated and that's through Grandad's business.

*David: Where was the coal yard? Actually at the railway station?*

Ray: At the railway station – yeah.

*David: OK, so how old were you when the line closed?*

Ray: The line closed February 5<sup>th</sup> 1955, which was when they withdrew the passenger service. We'd already lost our Sunday trains in 1951 and I think by then people had probably realised it was the thin end of the wedge ... then of course ... staff began to spread rumours

that they are going to close this railway line. Well we couldn't believe it .. the railway had been there all our life ... it was always there as far as we were concerned ... it would be there like forever. Then the announcement came in December 1954 that they would withdraw passenger services completely on the middle section, which meant that Privett, Tisted and West Meon would be closed completely, but they would still run ... in those days they were goods trains – nowadays they call them freight. One came up from Fareham and shunted the yards at Wickham and Droxford and then back ... and at the top end another goods train came down from Alton and shunted the yard at Faringdon.

*David: Was this Beeching?*

Ray: No you can't really pin this one on Dr. Beeching ... 'cos I'm talking about passenger services being withdrawn in 1955 – well old Beeching didn't come along until 1960 with his slash and burn policy as I call it – just sort of shut down everything. In 1954, what were they called in those days British Railways I suppose ... announced that part of their rationalisation scheme or programme was the withdrawing of passenger services in the Meon Valley and by just leaving truncated ends to work they would save themselves £39,000 per year – well you can do anything with figures I suppose – you can make them look good – you might make a profit or a loss and you can fiddle it all you like. I'm not saying they did fiddle it, but that's the reason they gave.

*David: where did people go and why did they go there?*

Ray: Well the funny thing in those days obviously the line ran from Alton to Fareham, but not many people went to Alton – there was a cheap day ticket on a Tuesday because it was market day, but not many people went to Alton and Fareham. They mostly got on the Hants and Dorset bus and went shopping in Petersfield or Winchester. East – West as opposed to the railway running North – South. I don't think really in er ... it was just over fifty years that it was running – don't think it ever made a profit, can't ever say it was crowded. War time of course they were far busier with military men going down to the South Coast.

*David: Tell me a bit about the trains that were actually on the line. I mean a passenger train ... how many coaches would that have had?*

Ray: well initially because all the platforms were on average 600 foot long – built that length because they were expecting a Waterloo to Gosport express service ... and it was said that the track was laid out to allow express speeds of 90 miles per hour. I don't think I would have liked to have travelled on the Meon Railway at 90 miles per hour, but initially 10 coach trains ... but of course they were shorter in those days – six wheelers. It eventually settled down to six coaches pulled in the first instance by Adams tender engines, eventually then M7 tank engines and because the passenger traffic dwindled and dwindled, eventually found that er two coaches was quite sufficient – and it was a push pull train that just ran backwards and forwards – we mostly had Drummond T9 engines on the goods trains. Occasionally a Drummond 060700 class and then there might be the odd Q or ... um just an unusual locomotive turned up. Couldn't have anything larger than that you see because of the ... er ... weight restriction on the bridges. Um ... so we never really had any 460 – any large locomotives.

On a ... we had two trains on a Sunday they – in the morning at 9 o'clock they crossed at West Meon and I think it was 7.30 in the evening that the two trains crossed again, but they were always three coaches – never many people on them as far as I remember but it was really a positioning move because a locomotive coming up from Portsmouth had to be at Woking on Monday morning to return and bring the goods back down the Valley and consequently the other way the the T9 going down the line had to be at Fratton to haul the goods that came up and went back up to Woking in the opposite direction – a positioning move mostly.

*David: Right so those were the two depots were they Woking and Fratton?*

Ray: Yes that's right, yes.

*David: OK Right – um how old were you when the line actually closed?*

Ray: Oh dear – er – 23.

*David: OK so you can remember it quite well then?*

Ray: Yes I can, yeah.

*David: What was it like – what was the feeling in the village? Was it celebratory? Were people really sad or ...?*

Ray: Sad ... oh there were protest meetings. I remember the National Farmers' Union especially ... they held meeting all over the place and had British Railway representatives there and they were sort of saying you can't close the line because we we ... the farmers of course ... um ... all their artificial fertilisers came by rail and then in the November they sent away thousands of tons of sugar beet off to Kidderminster and Peterborough to the sugar factories and then of course later on in about February or March it all came back as pulp for cattle feed.

They put all these things forward to say you can't close our railway because you know you just can't do it. But in the end they said ah well we're losing money and so we are going to shut it all down ... Disbelief I think was the main thing because um ... the railway had always been there and ... um ... we thought it always would be.

*David: How many staff were there at West Meon Station?*

Ray: Initially there was ... each station had a Station Master as did West Meon, but there was also um ... er ... I suppose there were two because they did shifts, they were porter and signalman combined both duties. I suppose they did a shift ... an early shift and a late shift. But I only remember two and of course a booking clerk, someone who issued the tickets.

*David: Did the station master live on the station?*

Ray: Yes, attached to the house.

*David: Do you remember the names of any of the staff?*

Ray: Yes I do we ... um .. yes I do. The Station Master I remember and have the fondest memories of was a chap called Mr. Pyle. Wouldn't dream of calling him Harry Pyle – he was Mr. Pyle to us, a great gentleman, a great knowledgeable chap – he knew everything about everything, Harry Pyle. And then I remember ... er ... Mr. Venner during the wartime ... er and then I can remember Dick Hunt ... he was here towards ... well we all ... he was a miserable chap because we always reckoned they sent him her to close the line – that wasn't true but!! He did everything he could to put everybody off – he was as rude as hell to everybody, and ... er ... we of course we had wagons coming in – grandad did in and out all the time and he was very strict on a thing called demurrage. When a wagon came into the goods yard you were given ... I believe you were given a day and a half to unload it and if you didn't unload it by that time you had to pay demurrage ... er so much a day it was kind of a penalty but we ... one of the signalmen was a very good friend of ours and he could not fiddle but he somehow arrange the stage book that if we'd emptied two pretty quickly yesterday and only one today he could somehow fiddle it round. A great big ... enormous ledger thing it was ... everything written in pencil of course. I remember he used to lick the tip of his pencil before he wrote in the book ... that seemed to make it write p'raps better – but this was all entered into the stage book and of course during the war time ... er the

government er ... the government said that all coal merchants had to hold 200 tons of fuel in stock. So grandad had to pay for them and then keep 200 tons of house coal mostly throughout the whole of the war, and it stayed there from 1939 to 1945 ... and then there was a coal shortage in 1946 as I remember. I remember some coal merchants came up ... they ran out of coal down there and they came up from Portsmouth to take ... I don't know two or three lorry loads three or four lorry loads, 20 ton or so of grandad's stock ... um ... he always tried to count the bags but I think they may have fiddled an extra one or two ... who knows?

*David: OK brill – Let's look at a photo Ray – this is from your book – um – which is called 'The Meon Valley Railway' by R. A. Stone and it's actually got some photos of the last train – um – I wonder if you can just fill us in – tell us what's going on in those photos.*

Ray: Well on page 96 there were two trains on that page on the top page ... well you would know that when I said the trains were push pull there was a locomotive and two coaches and when the train was going as it were backwards the driver sat in the end of the coach controlling all the levers and so on, on the locomotive by compressed air and they were always two coaches. But in that one because of the terrific amount of traffic on the last couple of days ... um ... it's always the same once you announce the closure of a line all and sundry come from miles around to travel on it and say oh yes I went on the Meon Valley the day before it closed. So they had to put an extra two coaches on. So you will notice that the train at the top of page 96 is at Tisted and ... er ... because the train had to go ... er ... couldn't be turned ... I think the turntable had been taken out of use by that time at Alton, you'll notice that the locomotive has been put on the other end of the train running tender first. And the one at the bottom ... um ... the engine had been turned there which goes to prove that Alton turntable was still in use. So the locomotive is facing what we call it's the proper way round smoke box first. And of course all these flags and last train notices and everything. A wreath was put on the front of the locomotive. That's on the services during the day be the evening one on page 97 you'll notice the number of the locomotive is 30326 ... well that was a Drummond 0700 tender locomotive and they put extra coaches on there and that was the last, last train as it were.

*David: Passenger train?*

Ray: Passenger train yes and the people there in the photograph I know that one of them was a councillor – perhaps two councillors from Fareham, came along to see the train off but of course at that time of the year February 1955, of course it was pitch dark all the way up. Well I gather that there were still a lot of people at um West Meon Station ... er ... singing Auld Lang Signe as the train came in and then as it pulled out.

*David: OK, was that the last the last train of all or were there goods trains after that?*

Ray: No, the following day there was a 10 coach train called 'The Hampshire Man' that ran like ...er ... Waterloo to Waterloo. It came all the way down through Sussed and eventually got to ...

*David: Do you mean Sussex?*

Ray: Yes I do, yes. It came eventually down to Petworth, Midhurst, Petersfield, Havant, Fareham, Wickham, Droxford, West Meon, Tisted ... um ... Privett, Tisted, Faringdon, Alton and back to Waterloo.

*David: Was that a special or something?*

Ray: That was a very special train yeah, 10 coaches. It only stopped at West Meon ... er ... because that was the only place between Alton and Fareham for water for the locomotive. So each locomotive had to be filled with water there for the long climb. Ten coaches can you

imagine going up through ... up through the Meon tunnel and Privett tunnel? 1 in 100 quite a drag.

*David: Gosh, yeah – so how many platforms were there at West Meon?*

Ray: Two – up and down.

*David: Up and down OK – and were there goods trains after that?*

Ray: Not a proper goods train but ... er ... I can't really remember but the following week ... um ... a train load of I suppose maybe four or five vans – you know box vans with sliding doors to pick up all the gear because there were ... there were the scales in the booking hall to weigh parcels that were being sent away ... on the platform there was a machine that you could put a penny in to get a bar of Nestle chocolate ... there was all the cans and things in the paraffin shed ... um ... sack trucks, luggage barrows ... seats ... er ... lamps all manner of things had to be collected and taken away and that went through and picked up at West Meon, Privett and Tisted – and then it went off I don't know where, just went to London I suppose.

*David: So how long was it before they actually started ripping up the track?*

Ray: I think it was a year at least, could have been eighteen months. In fact they closed the middle bit, they ... er ... put a sleeper ... er ... a rail sleeper across the track at Faringdon and chained down and padlocked it down ... and then all of a sudden someone remembered ... um ... for some unknown reason throughout the Second World War, two Pullman coaches were stored in the long siding at Privett and then some bright spark at Waterloo or wherever it was said ... 'Hang on a minute, I think we've two Pullman coaches still at Privett.' No they can't be down there ... Anyway, I think a few phone calls were made and yes of course they were still there. So they had to unchain the sleeper at Faringdon and run a locomotive and guards van all the way down to Privett and drag the whole thing back ... um ... to Waterloo.

*David: OK What ... Privett's now a house West Meon a ruin ... why did the one get sold and the other fall into disrepair?*

Ray: Well, some years ago Hampshire County Council in their wisdom ... um ... because they were going to make a Meon Valley Railway ... um ... bypass – bypass the villages of West Meon, Warnford, Meonstoke and Droxford and come out right down the end of Soberton. They bought the railway line from West Meon right to Knowle Junction and then by that time British Railways had sold off Privett so that was a private house and Tisted. So now the council owned West Meon Station and the goods yard. I tried to buy it to go and use it as a coal depot, and several other of my business friends were going to use bits and pieces of it ... fencing contractors, builders and a blacksmith etc ... that never got off the ground, because the County Council said we're going to build a bypass. If you move into the house we are going to have to chuck you out after five or six years.

So then they made it a public ... I suppose it is a bridleway really for walking and riding, and they wouldn't sell me the house because ... er ... this proposed bypass which of course we never, ever got.

One day they were making a car park in Denmead and the divisional surveyor said to his foreman 'We need five lorry loads of brick rubble – can you go to the yard and make sure we've got plenty?' So he came back and said 'I'm sorry sir we ain't got none.' 'I beg your pardon?' 'We ain't got none.'

'Oh so what do we own that we can knock down and find some brick rubble? Oh I know, West Meon Station. That's going to be knocked down anyway when we build this bypass.'

So up went ... um ... didn't have JCB's in those days – don't know what the diggers were and well ... they just smashed it all to bits. They made a bonfire of all the window frames and all the brick rubble was just shovelled into lorries and taken down to Denmead. So when you go to Denmead, the car park near to the church ... er ... has a foundation of West Meon Station underneath it.

*David: Wow! Fantastic OK ... Um ... then they started to demolish it in earnest – there was some big engineering stuff on that line – so were you involved in that?*

Ray: Yep they came to grandad because he was ... also ... coal merchant ... he was also a haulage contractor – could they hire a lorry for two years at least, maybe three? Or could he provide a lorry and a driver? I drove grandad's lorry most of the time. It was Tom Ward ... er ... from London – don't know what part of London – scrap metal merchants and of course they saw everything with its ... as a scrap value. I mean West Meon Viaduct for instance with 725 tons of steel, our beautiful viaduct that had been there forever. People came from miles to look at it, wonderful the machinery, built like a meccano set you know. And ... er ... um ... so they took all the metal away.

The first thing to go were the telephone wires – so that it didn't foul up the crane that was pulling all the bits ... er ... copper wire ... er ... all in bundles from West Meon down to just outside Droxford – wires were rolled up and put in a wagon at Droxford and sent away. West Meon, Privett and Tisted that was all rolled up and we took that to ... some to Faringdon and then to ... some to Alton in wagons and then went off to London.

Next thing to come out were the telephone poles – grandad used to buy those at a shilling each and sell them to ... um ... local farmers because they provided wonderful posts for building like dutch barns and things you know and you you wonderful use. And if you ... the bars that carried the insulators were oak, so we undid those and sold them ... there was a furniture maker here somewhere ... I can't remember where ... used to buy the oak.

Then of course the ... all the fish plates were undone and then the .... It was a Ruston and Bucyrus crane used on caterpillar tracks pulled the 60 foot lengths of railway line up and put them on the side ... um ... oh first of all the keys came out that held the railway in the chairs – the line that is. Then the line put on the side ... then the ... um ... er ... all the chairs had to be unscrewed, and they were put on my lorry and taken to ... up to Alton ... they went ... everything went up there and was taken from Alton. Then ... um ...

*David: Were they taken on lorries or ...?*

Ray: Yes ... um ... I chucked them on lorries, yeah ... and then of course a lot of the sleepers which of course were wooden ... Tom Ward – they had the best ones – what they called Grade 1. We were allowed, grandad was allowed to buy Grade 3's and 4's and we sold them to farmers and all sorts.

Then of course there were great lengths of steel sleepers. They all had to be cut in half to be hand loaded onto 8 wheelers to take them off tow wherever they were going to the scrap yard – then of course that left the ballasting. So that had to be shovelled up – we used to sell quite a bit of that and so did they to local farmers and things and eventually it was bit by bit it all disappeared.

*David: OK you say quite a lot local farmers ... um ... was this just West Meon or did you go over to East Meon quite a lot?*

Ray: Oh yes East Meon, yeah.

*David: Meonstoke?*

Ray: Yes, yes – a radius of oh I don't know 5 or 6 miles I suppose.

*David: And how much stuff came into the station that went to East Meon or did East Meon get it from Petersfield?*

Ray: No most of the East Meon farmers got their artificial fertilisers came into West Meon and then of course there were the seed potatoes as well – that's another thing that we carted – seed spuds. And then of course once they'd harvested all the potatoes, all the little tiny ones that were unsuitable for human consumption – they were brought up and put in a wagon, sprayed with a ...er ... er ... very dark blue powder, put in a water can, sprayed so no-one could possibly eat them – and they went off for pig feed.

*David: Wow!*

## **Interview with Ray Stone 14<sup>th</sup> December 2012 – this interview around issues relating to the Meon Valley, the Meon Valley Railway during the Second World War.**

*David: Hi Ray, we are going to talk again a bit more about things related to the West Meon Railway Station; Meon Valley Railway and the Meons in general, particularly around the Second World War. Er ... what were you doing in the Second World War – won't ask your age or ... nbut were you working, in school or what?*

Ray: When in September '39 war broke out I was seven. In school there were rumours among bully boys in school that there would be another war and also from our parents. We didn't really know what that meant ... um ... we knew that the Germans weren't very nice and course the old boys at the school said 'Well if the soldiers come to West Meon School we will throw stone at 'em.' Well, that wouldn't have been a lot of good ... And then I can remember my mother saying 'If there's going to be another war we should have to eat margarine' – and when we said what's margarine ... I can hear her words now ... 'It's just the same as butter only different.'

I can vividly remember ... um ... going over to the New Inn in West Meon which is not the Thomas Lord 'cos my grandad was there as landlord and we were all ... the whole family were sat in the kitchen on that Sunday a.m. September 3<sup>rd</sup> 11 a.m. to her Mr. Chamberlain's broadcast on the wireless. Not ... we didn't have radios in those days it was the wireless ... and I can hear the dear old chap's words now. 'I have to tell you now that this country is at war with Germany.'

We didn't know what to expect. Our parents and grandparents were obviously very anxious 'cos it was only 21 years that the First World War had ended and all the terrible consequences of that. Obviously, they feared that we might have to go through that again ... Er ... at school, West Meon School was the opening ... the Autumn Term was delayed by something like eight or nine days ... um ... firstly to allow for evacuees to arrive and the first ones came from Gosport. It was Fortnum (?) Road Infant School moved to West Meon on block, teachers and all and that put the numbers on the school register up from 120, up to 220. Where we all got to I don't know ... you had to walk down the road to the old Institute sometimes of an afternoon for overflow classes. The older boys went up and spent a couple of hours in the school gardens, so that got them out of the classrooms for a while and ... um ... the evacuees were ... they all came up by train and they were billeted all over the village in various houses.

I felt ever so sorry ... looking back now ... ever so sorry for the billeting officer, 'cos he had to go round the village and then find accommodation for something like 100 children.

*David: Did people volunteer for having the children or were they told they were going to have them?*

Ray: I think looking back as I remember if you had room you had to take someone in. After a while you could ... um ... go to the billeting officer and say I don't want these kids anymore 'cos some of them sadly came with fleas .. um ... things like impedigo ... um ... threadbare clothes and shoes with holes in the bottom of them ... felt ever so sorry for them although ... um ... er ... in ordinary people in those times never ever had plenty of money. We all managed but ... um ... we all were shall we say a little bit better off than they were ... I felt sorry for them really. Some were nice, some were blimin horrible.

*David: Did you have kids in your house?*

Ray: Yes I did. We had a boy from Gosport ... um ... who was on crutches and had a club foot and ... um ... the older boys at West Meon tried to ... um ... sort of poke fun at him and several of them he hit round the head with his crutch and that sort of stopped all that. But yeah George, George Dyer I think his name was, we had him and then he moved off somewhere else and then by 1941 ... um ... the blitz started in East London and we had a family down, I think from Charlton. We had a mum and two children and they occupied our front room. And ... er ... they stayed, they stayed for a while, not very long. I can't sort of remember now, but I don't think it was a twelve month and then moved off – and then we didn't have anybody ... cos nearly all the Gosport children by Christmas although they'd only been at West Meon about three months ... um ... they got fed up with us West Meonites, because one thing we didn't talk properly, the toilet was 100 yards up the garden and we only had a bath on Saturday nights, so one day I suppose it was at school there were maybe five or six who got together.

They were fed up with West Meon and wanted to go home. So they said 'So how are we going to get home?' ... and then one bright one said 'Well when we came they put us on the train at Gosport and I know the train stopped three or four times on the way ... but eventually someone called out 'West Meon' and we got out and we were here so if we walked down the railway line southwards we are bound to come home somewhere.' So that's what they started to do. How they got through the goods yard without being spotted by the signalman or the station master I do not know but they walked down the track towards Droxford. They probably got I suppose a mile, mile and a half and the afternoon to of course they were absent from school by then and someone wanted to know where they were by then.

The 3:18 ...er ... Fareham to Alton train was coming up to West Meon. The driver spotted these children walking alongside the line ... um ... halted the train and said 'What you lot up to? Where are you going?'

They said, 'We're going home.'

'Where's home?'

'Oh Gosport.'

'Oh I don't know about that.'

The guard by then had looked out of his window, realised what was happening and ... er ... hoicked them all back into one of the carriages and 'Where have you come from?'

'Well, we've walked from West Meon.' So back to West Meon they went on the 34:18 train.

A phone call was made to the billeting officer, it was an old chap Timmy Coldborne and said 'Look I've got six of your children at the station here ... you'd better come and collect them and ... um ... find out where they're billeted.' They were sent back to the houses.

By Christmas pretty well all of them had gone back home, and I don't think they moved out of Gosport again ... er ... for the rest of the war.

*David: OK, was there any bombings in the Meons do you know?*

Ray: Very, very few – only caused by the German bombers – by then of course they had airfields in France, so they could take off and within a short while be over either Portsmouth or Southampton ... um ... get rid of most of their bombs, well then they had to come inland to turn to go home and lots of times the bomb aimer would say to the pilot – 'Well I've got one bomb left, what shall I do with it?' and the pilot would say 'Well I don't know – just push the

button and get rid of it, and that's why bombs fell in all sorts of remote places around the Meon Valley for no reason at all. One bomb came down just in a house amongst a few people stuck miles up the topside of Warnford amid some woods and you would think ... um ... why would they drop a bomb there? There were others ... er ... I remember sort of between East Meon and West Meon ... um ... I suppose it was the army that did it ... they lit what they called decoy fires. As soon as it got dark they lit these great bonfires so that German bombers would look down and think there was a town or city or whatever that had been bombed and caught fire, and they would say, ' Oooh let's chuck a few more bombs in and ... um ... of course that's what ... the bombs that fell in open fields and didn't do any damage at all.

Well I remember between East Meon and West Meon ... um ... by Drayton ... um ... a landmine on a parachute got caught up in a tree and of course the bomb disposal troop had to come out and deal with that. How they did it I don't know. But then of course later in the war ... um the V1 ... um ... um ... airplanes ... um ... doodlebugs as we called them V stands for Vergeltungswaffe which is a reprisal weapon in German and they of course as soon as their fuel ran out they just tipped their nose down and landed wherever they landed.

*David: O.K. Were there any soldiers in the Meons, and was your Dad in the Service?*

Ray: Dad was, you had to, you had to join Home Guard, had to if you weren't called up for service – the men had to join something like Home Guard or auxiliary fire service, or be an air raid warden depending on your age, and as you know the women had to ... if they didn't go into the services they had to ... um ... join the land army or go work in an aircraft factory or be a nurse or whatever – you all had to do something.

West Meon had its own Home Guard. The actually ... um ... if commandeered is the right word – they sort of were able to use my Grandad's car which was a big Austin 18, seven seater car which during the day was used for the school taxi from 1941 and then we did private hire. But during the evenings dad had to load up Home Guard soldiers and ... er ... then take them wherever they had to go. For instance West Meon tunnel had to be guarded. There were Home Guard men ...um ... at both ends of the tunnel ... um ... to guard against parachutists. At our lovely great big West Meon Viaduct there were men there either end of the viaduct