



CARDALL'S CORNER

August 2015

High Street Memories

By Rowan Parker

At the time of writing, Southam's Market Hill and High Street is having its appearance dramatically changed. The town centre 'regeneration' project is under way, and the new Tithe Lodge development will soon be completed. This will be the third major change that I have seen happen to the town centre in my life time.

A big change took place in the 1960s when the old Rectory was pulled down and a new library, police station and Magistrate's Court built on the site. At that time the old Co-op shop was also pulled down, and a new one was built in its present position.

However, the first major change that I witnessed took place in the late summer of 1943 during WWII. One afternoon, at about coming home time from school, there appeared on the Daventry Street corner a tall African-American soldier riding a big Harley Davidson motor cycle. He was there to direct a convoy of armoured vehicles coming from the Daventry area and heading towards Coventry.

Crowds of children gathered, waiting to see what was happening and not least to see, in the flesh, a great big American soldier. Several lorries towing guns came first, turning from Daventry Street into High Street. Then came the Sherman tanks. However, the first one came round the corner far too fast and seemed to be out of control as it weaved about up High Street. It eventually finished up embedded in the first one of a row of old cottages that stood where Tithe Lodge stands now. This cottage was occupied then by the local Vet as his office, a certain Mr Lockwood. The other six or so cottages were derelict and were really an eyesore.

After the crash chaos reigned, there being five or six tanks stuck in Daventry Street. Just imagine the noise of those tank engines ticking over and the smoke from the exhausts confined to that small area. To all of us children - what absolute excitement! There were no health and safety rules to keep us away in those days. Eventually the cottages were all pulled down and the site remained empty until the Co-op was moved and the new police station built.

Editor's Note: Before Tithe Lodge was built, a full archaeological survey was undertaken which uncovered the foundations of a huge and amazing stone structure beneath the former Victor Hodges House. This is believed to have been a Tithe Barn – from which Tithe Lodge now takes its name. A description of the finds, (which included a Roman coin,) photographs, artefacts, and a fascinating account of Southam's evolution over the centuries is now available for all to see at our Summer Exhibition in Vivian House: 'Tithes, Taxes and Old Southam'. The Southam Heritage 2016 Calendar, which includes twelve photographs of old Southam scenes is now on sale and costs just £5 a copy.

If you have Southam memories to share, or would like to find out more about Southam Heritage Collection please email cardallcollection@hotmail.co.uk or telephone Bernard on 01926 613503 or Linda on 01926 814214. We are open on Tuesday and Friday mornings between 10am and 12 noon at Vivian House basement, on the corner of Market Hill and Park Lane. During August we will also be open every Saturday morning.

