This extract from Irvin’s memoirs remembers growing up in the Red Lion in the 1920s and the importance of time. Unfortunately, we do not have an audio clip as this was transcribed many years ago.

“Whichever way I look at it my first memory seems to be connected with time. Living in a public house time was of necessity an important subject. Even in the period of the depression during which I grew up there would often be some thirsty body waiting at the front door at opening time and complaining long and loud if that door opened, in his opinion, even a minute late. Then when he did get in he would, according to Grandmother, buy half a mild (the cheapest beer) and then spend the rest of the day drinking it. But the Red Lion had to open on time.

There was a clock in the bar. It was a wall clock in a long case, it had Roman Numerals, and it had a long pendulum and did not chime. It was usually wound up last thing at night after closing time and I was not allowed to touch it.

There was a kitchen clock, which lived appropriately enough in the kitchen. It had a big face with proper figures and a little pendulum behind a glass door.

There was a clock in what I knew as the big bedroom. It was as I learned much later, what is known as an American Clock and struck hours on a reverberating spring fastened on the back door. For some reason it was hardly ever used and I remember getting into trouble when I found out that I could wind it up and it went merrily along striking out the hours. No one could think how to stop it as it had no pendulum and my Grandmother carried it into the back bedroom where it struck away in miserable solitude until it ran down. I can also recall one or two tinny alarm clocks with bells on top but to my mind they were never used regularly. There was much less reliance in those days on mechanical rousing contrivances and in our village at any rate there was no knocker-up service such as we heard about in foreign areas some 20 or 30 miles up the road.

With two working clocks, no watches, no wireless for a time signal (I can’t recall anyone having one until Jim Parker got one and that would be early 30’s I reckon) and no telephone nor electricity, some way of ensuring correctness had to be found. In our case, for a time a least the answer was Mr Sales. He was a guard on the railway and of course everyone knew that the railway ran on time and guards were even provided with watches by the LNER to ensure this. Mr. Sales used to call two or three times a week and the clocks were duly set. I suppose he got some reward for his service, probably in liquid form, as did many other service providers.

So, the pub ran on railway time, but I do recall arguments about whether this was in fact the right time because it did not necessarily agree with Selby Abbey time and the buses ran on Selby Abbey time because they wouldn’t use railway time would they? How this was resolved I don’t know but I do remember it arising.

Of course, wind-up clocks were fallible and ours must have been pretty old and they often stopped, hence the value of my telling the time and shuttling between them. From time to time they wouldn’t start either and I could just recall visits from Mr. Robertson who came with his little leather case and ministered to their needs. It is only a few times I can recall him so he must have died or got too expensive or something and I remember other opinions being sought and remedies applied which usually resulted in paraffin type smells hanging around for a while. Somehow it must have worked fairly well and I don’t think there were that many missed buses or thirsty patrons around. More than that I suppose time was a factor in keeping neighbourliness alive in the village. I would be sent over the road to see what time Jack Thwaites made it and he and others would pop into the Pub on a similar mission.”