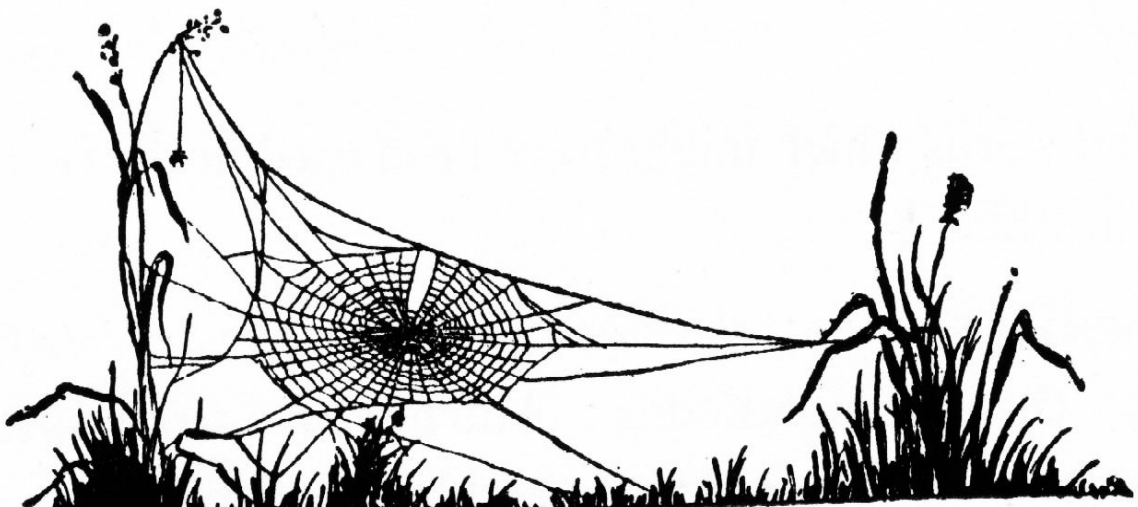


*Common  
Folk*

# *Common Folk*

**Vol. 1**

**Edited & Compiled by  
Colin Weightman**



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*This book is dedicated to  
Brian Rake (Rakey)  
1944 - 2007  
A Common kid sadly missed.*





# *Preface*

Plumstead and its big brother Woolwich, bounded by woods and bountifully filled in between with many parks and splendid commons was, and still is, a lovely place in which to live.

The title of my book reflects how these areas, in particularly the commons, has had an influence on the lives of the many generations of folk that have played, picnicked and generally enjoyed these lovely green and open recreational spaces.

These Commons have seen many generations of children spend countless happy hours, playing amongst those leafy grassy environs. Where folk, especially in spring and summer, still enjoy the mature shady trees and the grassy banks and in winter the often snow covered undulating slopes. This was especially so during those earlier years, when times were, comparatively, a whole lot slower, when folk tended to live much simpler life styles, in an era with very few cars and even fewer television sets and well before the personal computer impacted our lives.

The Commons, shared by us all, became a focal point, our 'common' denominator. It is no small wonder that the Commons are mentioned so fondly in many of the stories in this book. I believe that because of this 'common' identity a sense of belonging was established, which is so important in any community, especially so in today's more impersonal world.

So, for this reason, I thought that the title of this book might reflect in some way this 'common' bond that we have in our particular special part of south east London.

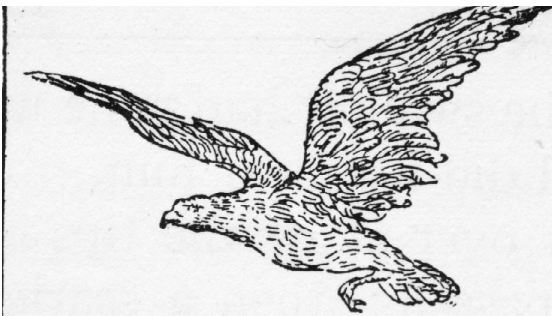
Also, you will notice there are often repeated themes in many of the stories in the book. Despite this repetitiveness, I chose to keep these stories, as originally told, because I feel that each story is a little piece of social history, told as it was remembered and as it was lived by these individual folk and should be preserved in this way.

So you will read often of the Commons and also of trips on the Woolwich Free Ferry, of bath night in the tin bath, fetched indoors from the hook on the back fence, the outside toilet, of schools such as Conway, of the Woolwich Market and of the Woolwich Arsenal and many other things that we all had in common with each other in those ever fading far off days.

*Colin Weightman*

*Author, Compiler and Editor*

*2008.*



Across the fields of yesterday  
He sometimes came to me,  
A little lad just back from play,  
The lad I used to be.



And yet he smiles so wistfully  
Once he has crept within;  
I wonder if he hopes to see  
The man I might have been.

Thomas S. Jones



## *Quotes that reflect a few thoughts concerning past memories;*

*God gave us memories so that we might have roses in December.*

**-J.M.Barrie (1860-1937)**

*Memories are not shackles, Franklin, they are garlands.*

**-Allan Bennet**

*(Forty Years On (1969) act 2)*

*Oft, in the stilly night,  
Ere Slumbers chain has bound me,  
Fond Memory brings the light  
Of other days around me.*

**-Thomas Moore (1779-1852)**

*(National Airs (1815) 'Oft in the stilly night')*

*Nothing recalls the past so potently as a smell.*

**-Winston Churchill (1874-1965)**

*Memory is the thread of personal identity',  
history of public identity.*

**-Richard Hofstadter (1916-1970)**

*The past is the only dead thing that smells sweet.*

**-Edward Thomas (1878-1917)**

*To excel the past we must not allow ourselves to loose contact with it; on the contrary, we must feel it under our feet because we raised ourselves upon it.*

**-Jose Ortega Y. Gasset (1883-1955)**

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# Introduction

It all began when I joined 'Friends Reunited' in early 2004. It was through them that I located a long lost childhood playmate, Bert Hooper, from about fifty years ago. Bert and I had grown up together as childhood neighbours; we lived a few doors from each other, in Sladedale Road, Plumstead.

I was born in the upstairs front bedroom of 71 Sladedale Road, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 1944, two days after the 'D Day' landings. Hitler had just started to launch his new terror weapons, the dreaded V1 flying bomb and soon after that the V2 rocket, at us in Britain and over the skies of London.

Luckily for me I don't remember the war, only the growing up after it and the playing on the many bombsites that dotted our area in those days.

I have many fond memories of my early life growing up in Plumstead and Woolwich, of the Commons and the woods. Wonderful nature filled environments us kids practically lived amongst. Places where we played and explored, acting out great adventures, places where our young fertile imaginations and exploits become virtual reality. Where, especially on weekends and school holidays, we played hard from morning till night, then, tired out at day's end, we made our way slowly home; home to a hearty tea and then, perhaps the weekly scrub in the tin bath, positioned in front of the coal fire, then, pyjama clad, we'd climb contentedly into our soft beds, to dream of our next days adventures. Yes, distant memories of childhood places in and around the hilly streets, of our local shops, our schools and the many other familiar places that made up our own particular community's unique identity.



*Colin, aged five, and his two older brothers, Mark and John, and younger sister Ann sitting on Nan's lap on the steps of 71 Sladedale Road, Plumstead, 1949. (Colin and Ann were born upstairs in the front bedroom.) The other girl (cropped) is cousin Sheila. (Evan's).*

This identity was very strong during harder times. It was so different for earlier generations. When folk had to endure very squalid and cramped housing conditions that often led to many chronic health problems. Life for ordinary folk was all too often very hard. Working long hours with low wages, often in very poor conditions. When there was virtually no help for folk when times became extra tough for them, perhaps through ill health or the death of the breadwinner. Then later, when the Depression years came, it brought even more shortages for folk and their lives became a constant drudgery, of trying to make ends meet, trying to get a meal on the table for the ever hungry family, or the money for the rent, some bread and milk, shoes for the kids, doctors bills etc.

This small excerpt from Len Thynne's story, 'Len Thynne Reminiscence' epitomises those difficult times; 'During the early 1930's when I was attending Timbercroft School, we had a boy name Walton whose family were very poor. One day he was late as usual, so the teacher decided to cane his behind. On being told to lift his coat - which was more like an overcoat because it was his father's cast-off jacket - this exposed his bare behind. The teacher thereupon told him to sit down. Some children would come to school without shoes on their feet in those days of the depression. Times were hard, and I remember one day I got home from playing outside and asked my mother for something to eat. She said, "there is nothing to eat; go to bed!" There are a few other similar stories in this book.

WWI and WWII cost families dearly and not only in the loss of life and limb. Every day folk wondered if they were going to survive to see another day. Uncertainty clouded everyone's thoughts and it affected their whole outlook on life.

For us 'baby boomers', born towards the end of or after WWII, life was somewhat different. In 'our' road we had quite a few other kids: We were one big happy family that, of course, also got up to a bit of mischief too. Us kids also had our own personal tragedies to contend with; that's life. But, to us kids, everything was always so constant. Nothing ever seemed to change, neither your neighbours, their jobs, your playmates, your schoolmates nor your teachers. No one ever seemed to move and, rest assured, everything was always going to be there the next day. We took this for granted, without any second thoughts.

But, when for me, suddenly, without any warning, my family moved to East London when I was around twelve years old, my young world totally collapsed. I was absolutely heartbroken. It is so very true, that old saying, "You don't fully appreciate what you've got until you've lost it!"

Bert Hooper, years later, said of that day, when I was sat looking over the tailgate and under the rolled up canvas blind at the back of the large removal lorry as it left Sladedale Road, "It took me ages to get over you moving away. The last time I saw you was when the truck went down the hill, and your little face was looking out of the back, crying just as much as I was."

Years later, when I got back in touch with Bert, we began catching up madly on our childhood reminiscences from almost fifty years previously.

After a while these childhood reminiscences, which we sent to each other via emails, began to grow into quite a collection of stories. (I now lived in New Zealand and Bert lived in Canada.) Also, at this time, we were both getting back in touch with other former childhood friends and old school mates, so the pile of reminiscences grew ever larger.

It was about this time when I thought, "Why not compile them into a book of stories?"

I got in touch with two local south London newspapers, the 'News Shopper' and 'The Mercury'. They, very kindly, ran an appeal-type article in each of their newspapers about the story of our reunion and I invited readers to send me their early reminiscences, along with any early photo(s), if available, for the proposed book.

From these two newspaper appeals more stories were submitted for my book. Later on, when my book web site was installed, (\*address below) I received a steady flow of interest, along with more stories from folk from every corner of the world. More often these were

from folk who were born and or were once residents of Plumstead or Woolwich and districts, who now live in other parts of the world. Or maybe they were from folk that have other connections with these areas, perhaps because of their own historical family tree connections.

I felt that a book of reminiscences would be worthwhile, recollections and remembrances of ordinary people, folk who were lucky enough to live, to play, to attend school and perhaps have worked in and around the environs of Plumstead and Woolwich. Stories from folk who knew intimately the many Commons, woods and parks and localities therein. A book in which folk could retell their very own special stories, of their families, their local area, streets and shops, clubs, events etc. From folk that once lived in those rapidly fading, far-off days of around the war years, of before, during and after it.

A book that, I hope, will capture some aspects of life; that tells something of this unique and so rich social history, as told from a grass roots perspective.

We will all eventually pass on, so, by publishing these stories, this book offers a small window for future generations to look back through. To read about some aspects of what life in these areas was like. To be able to do this before these stories would have also passed on with the folk, unrecorded, stories that would have then been lost forever.

I felt in my heart that it was imperative to capture and preserve these stories, along with the images accompanying many of them.

I have a very real love of social history. I am also, unashamedly, a sentimentalist. My own stories are written straight from the heart and therefore tend towards nostalgia, tinged with a strong sense of yearning in them.

I hope that you enjoy reading the stories. I also hope that they may trigger some happy, nostalgia filled, memories for you; perhaps even wet an eye or two.

Finally, If you have a story to share, be it sad, funny or whatever, and, if available, perhaps, an early photo(s), please submit it either to my book web site, which can be reached at:

[www.plumstead-stories.com](http://www.plumstead-stories.com)

or by writing to;

**'Stories'**  
**PO Box 15-324**  
**Wellington, 6243**  
**New Zealand.**

So get that paper and pen out, or switch on the computer, and get the old grey matter working!

Meanwhile folk, kindest regards.

**Colin Weightman** ... always a Common kid.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following folk for their very kind help and assistance and for their advice and also for their encouragement in producing this book.

I am very much indebted to my (patient?) friend Peter Cowley, whom, without his continued help and assistance and his computer skills and know how, this book could not have been developed. (These thanks are also extended to Peter for his skills as web master for my book web site, [www.plumstead-stories.com](http://www.plumstead-stories.com) which he is constantly maintaining and upgrading.)

I am also very indebted to the late Allan Dewar for his kind invaluable assistance in his proof reading and correcting of most of the stories.

I extend these thanks to Bill McLeod for his kind in help proof reading the earlier submitted stories and also for the later help from Dave Bolton and Philip Cameron for their such valuable and knowledgeable suggestions when I was weakening somewhat with the task.

Many kind thanks for all the early help and advice, good ideas and wonderful encouragement and indeed the many stories that I have received from Albert (Bert) Hooper.

Many thanks also to Lorna Chudasama for her many invaluable contributions and sourcing of many of the photos and facts, both for the book and also for the book website.

Also, my sincere thanks to the Greenwich Heritage Centre for their kind permission to use many of the historical photographs. *\*See footnote 1*

I am very much indebted also to the Plumstead Common Environment Group (P.C.E.G.) for their very generous donation of stories from folk's reminiscences, in particular to Julia Cowdell and to Nicholas Day, the P.C.E.G. chairperson. *\*See footnote 2*

I would like to thank the B.B.C. for the kind use of many of the stories contained within my book. *\*See footnote 3*

I am also very grateful indeed to the 'News Shopper' and the 'Mercury' newspapers for their assistance and kind help in the articles they ran in their newspapers in regards to the appeal for stories for this book.

Also, I sincerely thank all those wonderful folk who have sent in their stories. Ordinary stories from ordinary Common folk that tell it as it was for them in an era long gone, an era that has changed so very much and indeed continues to change so rapidly as time goes by.

Again, many, many thanks to all these folk and also to the many other folk not mentioned here, for all their help and valued advice, the many photos and for their encouragement.

I have tried to abide and comply with all and any copyright issues. I sincerely hope that I have not infringed any of these. If, however, I have accidentally done this, I unreservedly apologise to anyone I may have infringed on.

Colin Weightman.

*\*1 [heritage.centre@greenwich.gov.uk](mailto:heritage.centre@greenwich.gov.uk)*

*\*2 [www.pceg.co.uk](http://www.pceg.co.uk)*

*\*3 WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC.*

# *A Boy's Excitement During The War*

*Denis Allen*

I was born in the British Home For Mothers and Babies, which I think was between Woolwich and Eltham. The date was 4th November 1934.

My parents, John and Cecilia Bridget Allen, lived at 46 Sutcliffe Road Plumstead. My father worked in the Woolwich Arsenal, I believe somewhere in the Stores Department.

I enjoyed living in Plumstead, playing on Winn's Common, Bostall Woods and the surrounding areas and, when the war came, I enjoyed it even more. That may sound weird, but I truly believe that many boys at that time also felt the same as I did about the situation.

My closest mates were Harry Capon, John Swanston, Tony Pitcher and a big lad called Peter Thynne, who we were rather wary of because of his size and strength, but he was, I remember, more of a gentle giant.

I attended Timbercroft Lane Infants School and, maybe because of the frequent visits to the air raid shelter, I really enjoyed it. The mixture of learning and the frequent interruptions, listening to the aircraft overhead, kept you in almost constant excitement. Sometimes, on the way home from school, a few of us would wander around looking for bombed buildings to clamber over, often being ejected by an official of some kind or other, and told to "Have some respect you little \* # ^? %\*! s."

As the war went on and the visits to the Anderson shelter in the back garden were almost nightly occurrences, so my excitement grew. The camp like atmosphere of the shelter, cups of hot sweet tea with loads of condensed milk in it, the shelter's fuggy atmosphere and the odd bacon sandwich, if you were lucky, were far removed from the ordinary, probably humdrum, way of life for us kids whose parents worked hard for a few bob a week. I think more than a few of us became adrenalin junkies, which may have coloured my future life to a certain extent.

We all had our own code of discipline though. For instance, after the war, if we were wandering about Woolwich, usually in small groups, not looking for any trouble, and we heard the cry, "P.C. Brandon's' around", we would all straighten up and look innocent until we saw him. When we did see him we would all say, 'hello', and he would look at us as he passed and give a slow nod. Not so if we were playing on the fringes of Bostall Woods and the words, "The Kelly boys are around". Because if you heard those words you high tailed it for home! The rumour was that they were six or seven members of an Irish family who were always out and about looking for trouble. I never ever met them and I never met any kids who had seen them, so maybe it was a bit of pure folklore.

When I was fifteen I started work in the Arsenal as an office boy, prior to beginning an apprenticeship.

I could go on for a long time, about joining the R.A.F. for five years, then returning to Abbey Wood, where my parent's lived, then working at Ford's, then at two power stations and then at a scientific instrument makers, all for fairly short periods of time, before managing to get into

aviation again, where my desire for adventure, taking risks and very unofficial amounts of flying sated my adventurous side.

I finally retired, halfway through my 71st. year. I still miss work, but now have a heart condition and arthritis. Not bad for an ordinary little Plumstead 'oik', who was born with Scoliosis, that was never picked up by Military Medics.



*A Family entering their Anderson shelter carrying their gas masks in the boxes.*

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# *A Child's Chores*

*Mike Lukas*



*My mum's parents, William Joseph and Louisa Emma Barnes, with mum's sister Joyce and cousin Godfrey.*

*We conclude from Joyce's likely age in the photo that it was taken c1935/1936, probably in their back garden at Robert Street.*

*William Joseph worked at Woolwich Arsenal at the time, in common with so many of the workforce in the area.*

Mum's family lived in and around Robert Street and Ann Street, very close to the railway line, near the Plumstead Railway Station. I think the railway was a central part of the children's play activity and mum used to tell me stories of them all sitting on the walls beside the track, watching the steam trains and waving to the passengers as they went by.

Her grandfather, Joseph James Barnes, was a gravedigger for Woolwich Borough Council in his later life, around the 1920's through to the 1930's.

Mum used to tell a story about how, as a seven year old, she would have to walk on non school days and on weekends, all the way from Ann Street to Plumstead Cemetery

to take her granddad Joseph his lunch, often a hot pudding or something similar, still in its oven dish, and then she would have the return walk all the way back home again.

As she was the second child and oldest daughter of a family of eight, Violet often said that she was regularly kept away from school to help her mother with household chores and also to look after her younger brothers and sisters as well.



# *A Child's Day Out*

*Colin Weightman. A Common kid remembers.*

*Market Day, Beresford Square, Woolwich....1950'ish.*

Excitement, anticipation, of sights and sounds.

Hurry to the bus stop; hop on the bus or the tram.

The trip in; familiar places and sights.

And, in the distance, ...

The Market,

...all noise and smells,

crowds bustling and shuffling, smiling folk.

People looking and touching and asking,

meeting and talking,

buying and selling,

calling and shouting.

Rows of barrows, canvas clad, all lit up with strung out bulbs.

Lines of stalls, a canvas town,

all grandly arraying,

all proudly displaying,

colourful piles of fruit neatly stacked,

topped off with white price tags.

In season plums red, black, yellow and green.

Apples and cherries, so shiny they gleam.

Oranges and lemons and sweet tangerines,

all priced cheaper than their neighbour's,

or so it seems!

Over the busy road that cuts through,

where wet cobblestones greet you,

are stalls full of fish with glassy still eye

that coldly stares at you as you walk by.

Neatly piled in slimy wet stacks,

blue marbled mackerel, shimmering masses of sprats

silver scaled herrings, big open mouthed cod,

and a few large brown-red haddock.

Headless congers coiled, not nice,

sad flat-faced plaice sprinkled with ice,

and some big fat red fingers poking about

chipping at ice blocks with frozen bubbles

trapped inside, and can't get out.

And just up from the sharp smells of the fishes  
comes the loud shouts of the fella selling dishes.

"Look at all these." he invitingly calls out,  
"This finest porcelain, so lovely to see,  
you'll not find none cheaper than me, no doubt!"

More crowds gather around a man stood high on a box.

"Here's a set of cuff-links, a set of crystal tumblers, AND a box of chocs.  
Who'll give me a quid, no?... 'ang on, 15 bob AND..... I'll chuck in anu'ver box.

OK then, yer miserable sods...

.....give us 'arf a nicker and I'll chuck in a slab of chocolate on tops,

....to the first ones in wiv the dosh!"

There yer go 'arry, "Take the good ladies' money, by josh"

And at the end of the very long busy day

the hustle and the bustle slowly fades away,

along with the crowds and the noise

and the light of the day.

Dark hosed-down wet cobblestones

reflect the street lights.

as council dustmen, clad in vest jacket,

shovel the rubbish piled into great heights,

the left over remnants of the now still Market.

And down darkened side roads

costermonger's barrows bereft of their loads,

sounds of steel rimmed wooden wheels grows,

as barrows now empty and bare are parked in long rows.

Barrows for kids to play on whilst awaiting,

next market day.

To be pushed and pulled out again come what may,

be it rain, be it shine, or be it hail or snow.

To be piled up high and arrayed once again to make a good show.



# *A Childhood Stay In Plumstead*

*Valerie Cunningham*

Why does the mention of Plumstead and Purrett Road Junior School, as it was formerly known in the '50s, still bring a warm glow to my heart? I lived on the Downham estate and attended a local school when my mother announced she was to have a 'big operation in hospital'. In 1954, my sister Gillian was placed with one aunt and my brother Raymond and I were placed with another for six weeks; auntie Ciss, short for Cecilia, who lived in Plumstead. This situation arose soon after we had resettled after a six months stay in the middle east where my father had been working. I was filled with excitement and fear. What adventures might lay ahead and would my mum be all right?

I liked auntie Ciss. She soon introduced me to the local Public Baths, which I loved. Huge baths filled with steaming warm water, the usual medicated soap and clean towels. I could stay for a long time soaking and relaxing my cares away. Auntie also ushered me to the outside loo, which I hated.

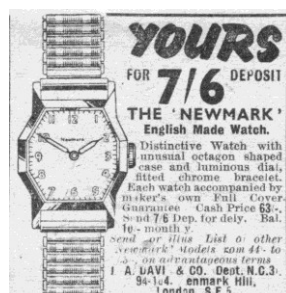
Auntie had visited Purrett Road School to brief the staff thoroughly about my situation. She was a Scot and pronounced, to my young mind, Purrett as 'Parrot'. This latter name I latched onto easily.

To integrate smoothly into my new class the teacher, by way of introduction, encouraged me to tell stories about my recent travels and visits to market souks and stony, desert lands. My brother reminded me that we were also taught the descant to the hymn Crimond, which seemed very advanced at the time.

However, to my astonishment these exotic places almost paled into insignificance when I discovered that there was little segregation between boys and girls. We played together and, most importantly, we partnered each other in country dancing, apparently with no embarrassment. This was a welcome revelation. For a short while, there was to be no more boys and girls sitting on either side of a school hall for excruciating lengths of time, the strain of which led the girls into partnering each other, with the boys looking on.

Thank you Michael Box and Master Heinz for partnering me so well and thank you to my teacher who made my short stay so memorable.

Finally, thank you auntie Ciss, for the kindness and sensitivity you showed a worried little eleven-year-old girl and also for the generosity you showed my family until my mum was safely home again.



# *A Delivery Boy Remembers*

*Dave Carpenter*



*Lakedale Road, Morgan's' shop is on the right. Photo: Alan Gibbs.*

My first job (1952?) was over a Christmas period, working for Morgan's in Lakedale Road. They had the main shop on the right hand side of the road going down, and another one on the opposite side, that sold biscuits etc. I spent a few days in that one, sorting and shifting the biscuit tins and (suffering!) the flirtatious bantering of the women who worked there. I was quite sorry to be transferred across the road to deliver orders, on a very unstable deliveryman's bike. Deliveries down and across the lower roads were OK, but the deliveries that took me up hill on Lakedale and Sladedale Roads were the worst. I had to push the bike all the way up the hills.

My next job was on Saturdays and school holidays, on the bread round with the \*R.A.C.S; which was situated along Powis Street, nearly opposite Hare Street. I was quickly given the job of collecting Victoria the horse, a huge beast, from the stables. These were situated, and backed onto, a narrow strip at the top of the railway embankment, on the other side of the track. They were accessed by a long ramp that went up from the cobbled yard of the bakery, via a narrow bridge. Victoria was always pleased to see me and she plodded quite happily behind me, following me across the bridge and down the ramp. (I had to watch out for the goods steam locos as they filled the whole cut with soot and steam.) Once in the yard I had to harness her up. I remember the heavy collar that I had to get over her head. To do this job, I had to balance on a box to reach up. Once she was in the shafts I filled her nosebag with chaff from a large trough and put it over her head. I then had to fill the spare one and hang it on a bracket under the wagon. While I was doing this Alf and his mate would be filling the wagon with all the various types of bread.

Once loaded we set off along Powis Street, with the horse farting all the way! Until we reached the bottom of Burrage Road, where we all got off the van and helped the old horse by pushing, whilst at the same time keeping the steel brake shoe ready to slip behind the wheel.

About halfway up Bloomfield Road was a café where we always stopped for a bowl of porridge and a cup of tea; this was never paid for; I think Alf had an arrangement with the owner!

Our round took us all along the turnings at the back of Plumstead Common Road, down to the Slade, up Timbercroft Lane and all of the many turnings and loops. On these roads the horse would plod on, while Alf's mate and I would deliver the bread from large willow baskets and then meet the van at the next turning. There were places where some people always bought out a plate of food for the horse. Alf always carried a bag of goodies, just in case these failed to appear, as there was no way Victoria could be persuaded to proceed without her usual snacks!

The round continued on, doing all the roads down towards Swingate Lane, from Thornhill Avenue and along past Duncroft to Highgrove. We then went down Highmead, looping Edison Grove and Combside, to rejoin the van at the bottom of Highmead. The last part of the round took us into Kent, down Glenmore Road, which in those days was quite a tough council estate.

I remember an occasion that a particularly bad paying house in that road had ordered a birthday cake. These special orders were kept in a small locker in the side of the van. When Alf opened the locker door the cake fell out, upside down, onto the road. We spent a long time extracting road grit from the icing and dressing it up as best we could with an old knife that was carried in the locker. "They won't like this, they'll break their teeth if they hit a piece of grit!" I said. "Don't worry about it, they never pay their bill anyway!" They never complained!

Victoria always dropped her manure in the same road, so there was always one or two keen gardeners at the ready, with bucket and shovel, waiting to pounce on the steaming mound.

The money was always collected on Saturdays. I had to add up how much the customers owed that I delivered to into a thick red book, this taught me mental arithmetic quicker than any school could. You were soon put in your place should you get it wrong! The housewives knew exactly how much their bill was! Quite unlike supermarket shopping today!

I was about 13 years old when I worked at Morgan's and fifteen when I did the bakers round. I used to get fifteen bob for a Saturday and three quid if I worked all the week in my school holidays. I saved enough to buy my first motorbike, a 1933 purebred racing Norton International. I used to go to school on it, once I reached age sixteen (circa 1955).

I left the bakers round when I started my apprenticeship. Not long after, the RACS in their wisdom decided to do away with the horse-drawn vans and went over to diesel vans. The rounds took twice as long to do, as the driver had to keep getting in and out all the time. Whereas, with the horse the bread was hooked out of the back of the van while it was on the move, a kind of tortoise and hare situation. The worst part of it all was, all the horses went for slaughter!

*\*Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society.*

# *A Good Cheap Day Out On The Ferry*

*Colin Weightman ...A Common kid*



We used to play and cruise on these grand old paddleboats and remember them with much fondness.

As a young kid I would pack some sandwiches and an apple or banana and take off for a great day full of promise and adventure. I could decide to go on the tram, cost 1d, or walk and buy some sweets with the penny.

The ferry trip was always full of interest. The sight and sound and smell of the large coal-fired steam engines that drove the two large side paddle wheels and the big revolving piston shafts pumping away. The constant ringing of the telegraph bells signalling the many changes in the speed and paddle direction as these busy ferry boats manoeuvred this very active stretch of the Thames River and fighting the often strong flowing river currents.

On the other side, in North Woolwich, we would get off and head along to the docks. The first docks had the two drawbridges (See photo) that would hold up the road traffic as they were raised to let the large ships pass into the King George V dock, or into the lock gates on their way out. The second bridge, about 1/8 mile further on, was the swing bridge. This would swing sideways to let the ships in and out of the Royal Albert Dock and lock gates. These particular docks had the famous 'Mammoth', a floating crane, moored in the dock next to the road. It was the largest floating crane in the world in those days. (See photo)

The docks were also the largest docks in the world at that time. These very busy docks were often packed full of ships, ships from every corner of the world and many famous old ships used these docks in their hey-day.

As kids we would watch these ships as they passed through the lock gates. These locks regulated the ever-changing tidal water levels the Thames, thus keeping the docks at a constant water level. Huge ocean-going passenger cargo ships to smaller cargo tramp steamers would be towed skilfully through these narrow lock gates by tough little shiny black tugs that were dwarfed by many of these big ships that they had to manoeuvre. They would push them with their bows which had massive spliced rope fenders strung around them, or they would pull and hold back the ships' forward momentum with great thick woven lines. I remember seeing a steel cable that was being used for this task suddenly snap under the huge load with a loud



Road drawbridge is up as a ship enters the KGV Docks.  
Photo: RS Rawlings 1950.



'Mammoth' floating crane, Royal Albert Docks. Photo: RS Rawlings 1950.

cracking sound like a cannon, whipping back so viciously it would have cut a person in two like butter if they had been in its way. (I saw two other cables snap like this in the lock gates over the years.)

We would often call up to the seamen working on the decks whilst their ship was in the lock gates. We asked them for any matchboxes (to add to our collections of foreign matchbox labels, along with different foreign brands of cigarette packets.) Sometimes it was difficult to convey to these foreign seamen what we were requesting so we would mime striking matches and smoking and they would sometimes toss down a fag, or even a foreign coin from their particular country.

At the entrance to the lock gates were

wooden piers with steps leading down to the Thames river, where we would play at dodging the waves and, if the tide was out, we would search along the muddy beach for any treasures. We would slowly get caked in stinky smelly Thames mud and we'd truly look like happy little London mud larks, proper flipping urchins, with our splotted dried muddy hands, legs and clothes.

On the way home the choice was either go back via the tunnel or on the ferry. If the tunnel was chosen it was then either go down to the tunnel by the lift, or to race the lift down by running down, spiralling round and around the stairs, that wound their way around the descending lift shaft to the bottom and the start of the long ¼ mile paved foot tunnel. It was good fun walking along, in our childish awe, in the knowledge that we was actually walking under the cold dark water and mud of the Thames. We loved running and racing each other along this white glazed brick tube, lit up with lights that disappeared into the narrowing distance. Our voices would echo back at us as we shouted and screamed in our childhood exuberance and playful happiness.

At the other end, we'd often race the lift up the spiralling stairway, back into the bright daylight world again.



**Old Busybody :** 'You nasty dirty boy!'  
**Mudlark :** 'Well, you'd be dirty if yer profession was catchin' worms.'



*Woolwich Ferry approach around 1900 (?) The round building is the entrance to lift and the foot-tunnel that links Woolwich to North Woolwich that runs under the Thames.*  
*Photo: Clare Crawford.*

And to think that we could do all this activity without hardly getting out of breath; flipping amazing!

Yes indeed, and enjoying the whole day out with only a flipping penny, a good long and very cheap day out for us young Common folk.



*Woolwich Free Ferry John Benn*



*Woolwich Foot Tunnel and Lift*

# *A Liturgy For The Integrity Of Creation*

*Francis Hiller*

*Address delivered by Frances Hiller at St Mark with St Margaret Church, Plumstead Common on 14 May 2000.*

*Touch the earth lightly,  
use the earth gently,  
nourish the life of the world in our care:  
gift of great wonder,  
ours to surrender,  
trust for the children tomorrow will bear.*

The earth is not ours to do with as we will. The message of this New Zealand hymn is unequivocal. It can be applied globally or locally, to the world or to Plumstead. It expresses concern for the future of our world. It emphasises our responsibility as stewards of our environment, which we hold in trust for tomorrow for those who will follow.

Many people these days are turning away from Christianity, looking instead towards spiritualities that teach a reverence for creation that the Christian West seems to have lost. They are searching for alternatives to what they see as the exploitative injunction set out in the Bible in the Book of Genesis. In chapter 1, verse 28, God instructs humankind to 'fill the earth and subdue it; to have dominion over every living thing that moves upon it.' For too long this injunction has been interpreted by some as a licence for humans to do what they like with the earth, with disastrous results.

But there are strands within our Christian heritage that affirm an incarnation faith that honours created matter. The Celtic and Franciscan traditions have an approach to God and to God's creation that is holistic rather than dualistic. It is an approach that honours created matter, taking account of the interdependency of the constituent parts of creation. Francis of Assisi, writing in the 12th century, uses language and thought, which contain no trace of a need to dominate or transform nature. Instead he expands the Christian call to love God and the neighbour to include all creation. He does this in a way that heals the split between God, humanity and nature that is found in so much of Christian literature before and since.

'No man is an Island' says John Donne. We are beginning to be more aware that we are all part of humanity - we are individuals, but we are inseparably linked; we are unique, but wholly inter-dependent. And we are not linked only with each other as human beings, but with the whole of creation of which we are a part. What Francis knew instinctively, scientific research has confirmed - the importance of bio-diversity, the knowledge that we are merely a strand in the web of life, as we read in a passage attributed to Chief Seattle back in 1854:

The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

We are at last beginning to realise the dangers the earth faces from greed and exploitation. We are all beginning to be aware that capitalism does not contain all the answers. It is increasingly clear that there has to be a debate about its future. Whatever goods it delivers, it fails a substantial number of people. The greed and lust for power of the few is the cause of the poverty and powerlessness of the many, and of the desecration and destruction of the earth's resources.

But why has it taken so long for humanity to come to the realisation that we are part of the created order, the created order that is longing and struggling for completeness and redemption (Romans 8.18-25)? We are not individuals living in isolation. What we have, we hold in trust for others, whether it is our parks and open spaces or the world's resources. We have a responsibility both for those we share the earth with now and those who will come after us. This is why we cannot separate environment issues from justice issues.

The same values can be applied both globally and locally. As a community of people living in and around Plumstead, working together to improve the quality of life of all members of the community, you will discover that the boundary between environment issues and justice issues at times becomes blurred.

I was born in 1953 in a prefab on Winn's Common, and I lived there for the first five years of my life. In those post-war days of rationing, gardens on the Common were full of vegetables, chickens and even the odd goat. When the prefabs were demolished and the land returned to grass, we moved to the new estate across the main road, but returned to the Common to play.

As we grew up, my siblings and I explored every inch of that expanse. It was from a tree on the Common overlooking King's Highway that I fell at the age of 11, and was in St Nicholas Hospital for a week. My brother and I had been throwing acorns at the roofs of passing buses. The Common continued to figure in my life in quite a big way. I walked across Plumstead Common each weekday on my way to school and twice on Sundays to come to church. As a teenager I roamed endlessly, pondering the meaning of life, and as a Cub Scout leader I played rounders on summer evenings. On a warm Sunday evening after Evensong there was sometimes cricket with the Youth Club followed by a drink at the Prince Albert, overflowing onto the Common as still happens today.

Looking back in this way, I can see that growing up in Plumstead, with its open spaces and parks, helped to make me the person that I am today. I see this process being repeated in my children as they grow up in Plumstead. We are shaped by our environment. Plumstead Common Environment Group is working to help create somewhere where it is good to live and good to grow up. This is especially true of its attention to the detail of things which can easily be dismissed as unimportant, reporting broken street lights and abandoned cars, litter control, clearing up broken glass, and fighting the endless battle against graffiti. Its members also work continuously to enhance both the beauty and the natural abundance of our open spaces and the wildlife they support.

What we have, we hold in trust for others, whether we're talking about Plumstead Common or the resources of the earth. Our open spaces are enormously important. They help to civilise us. We all benefit from them. Children who are cooped up in flats with no gardens

need the space. The Common provides a focal point for community events like the Make Merry. We are all stewards of the environment, which shapes us, and will shape our children.

In global terms, as a human community, how we use the earth's resources represents a choice either for life or death. In local terms, the way we care for our environment can improve the quality of life for everyone in our community, both now and in the future. Both in the world and in Plumstead the Christian choice must always be for life, life in all its fullness.

*God of creation  
the earth is yours  
with all its beauty and goodness  
its rich and overflowing provision  
But we have claimed the earth for our own  
plundered its beauty for profit  
taken its resources for ourselves*

*God of creation, forgive us  
may we no longer abuse your loving generosity  
but care gently and with justice for the earth  
which we hold in trust for those who will follow*

*Thanks to the Plumstead Common Environment Group for their kind donation of this story.*

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# *A Rolling Tyre Gathers Much Mischief!*

*Colin Weightman*

Reminiscences of a Common Kid

A load of us kids had had a good day at rolling the tyre.

Darkness had descended and we were going back home to eat a hearty well-earned tea. We decided to quit playing with the large old lorry tyre and launched it on a steep and fast journey down the hollow (that we kids pronounced the 'oller). It was soon rolling and bouncing madly and quite speedily on its way towards its unsuspecting target at an increasingly breakneck speed. Its final bounce was up over and into a back garden, crashing very loudly into a large dustbin, scattering its contents everywhere. (I seem to recollect that it smashed a window as well.)

We stood, somewhat wide-eyed and open mouthed, at this horribly spectacular scene, rooted to the spot. However, when the back door of the offended house opened and two large and very angry fellows came running out and climbed a ladder into the hollow and then came running towards us screaming for our blood, we were off like greased lightning.

With two potential murderers in hot pursuit, shouting that they were going to kill us, plus a few other unpleasant things that are best not put in print, I was in super overdrive. And, besides the fear of being caught and killed by these two, I would then have to deal with being killed again by my parents, when they found out why I had been killed in the first place! Man, we certainly put ourselves through a terrible amount of extra fear when we were young Commoners, didn't we ever.

With these terrible thoughts fuelling my little pumping legs I dove into the Beacham's front garden, our near neighbours, frantically thinking, now what? I went to lie under their front privet hedge, between it and the front wall, but instead I spotted their large corporation dustbin with heavy-duty lid. Snatching the lid off, I climbed in and manoeuvred the lid on top. I well remember the long.. the very long... wait. My lungs were bursting for air, but I feared that the sound of my heavy breathing and gasping would betray my hiding place.

It felt like I had been cooped up in that dark and smelly dustbin for hours, but I was probably in there for around five minutes maximum. Eventually I plucked up courage and emerged from my hiding place, back into the cold still night air. Cautiously I craned my ear for any footsteps, for any voices, as I slowly crept out to the road to see if the coast was clear. I then burst into another life-preserving dash, this time to my house, daring not to look back



*Colin and his close mate Ken Daws, both aged eight. c1952. Ken was born totally deaf.*

*Photo: Colin Weightman.*

to see if anyone was after me. It was an incredible feeling, of actually still being alive! However, it was a long time before any of us ventured down that part of the 'oller again.

Over on Winn's common I also remember the mad antics of us rolling down the slopes, over by the wooden door that was set in the corner of the St Nick's Hospital grounds brick wall. We would climb into the large lorry tyre's crevice and hang on to it for dear life as we turned head over heels, round and round, at an ever-increasing, blurring, dizzy speed, crashing through gorse bushes, (this added considerably to the danger, thus extracting the maximum amount of fun) over these humps and bumps. (Added bonus was who crashed into the hospital wall the hardest!)

Then there was the wicked 45-gallon steel drum run (complete with jagged metal edges). Man, that was sheer madness too! Rolling at breakneck speed to the bottom of the grassy hill, to emerge elated, very dizzy and quite battered, bruised and often bleeding. Then having to wait again, impatiently, for your turn again; for another mad ride, and then another and another...

We certainly lived dangerously and played hard on those there Common slopes.

*(Just to add. It was definitely none of us kids that rolled that other tyre down Lakedale Road in the unfortunate incident that befell poor little Joan Doling and her dolls pram! In her story; 'Joan Doling Reminiscences')*



# *A Short History Of The Royal Arsenal*

*Submitted with permission of Jerry England*



*Woolwich Arsenal, No1, Main Forge.*

Woolwich, Kent, England

SOURCE: This is an excerpt from a Woolwich Arsenal History that was published on the Internet in 1997. The original document and link no longer exist. I am presenting this excerpt only as a source of information for others who, like myself, are seeking knowledge of the Woolwich Arsenal's history so they may better understand their own family genealogy. I can add nothing more.

The long association of artillery with Woolwich began with the setting up of a gun depot there in the reign of Elizabeth I. In the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century it (later the Royal Carriage Department) was opened in 1664 at Tower Place in Woolwich and, in the following year, the gradual removal of gun proof from the Artillery Garden to Woolwich took place. Some thirty years later, in 1695, a laboratory was established (subsequently known as the "Royal Laboratory ") for the manufacture of ammunition and pyrotechnics at The Warren in Tower Place, and in 1716 a foundry for casting brass guns was built there. This formed the nucleus of the "Royal Gun Factory". Thus the pre-eminence of London as a centre of artillery development was lost in the 17th Century.

When the Royal Artillery was formed in 1716, Woolwich became its headquarters and its officers, together with the teaching staff of the nearby Military Academy, came to exert considerable influence on the manufacture of guns and ammunition.

The establishment at the Warren which had been named the "Royal Arsenal" by George III in 1805, included the Royal Carriage Department, the Royal Laboratory, the proof butts and the

Royal Brass Foundry, the fore-runner of the Royal Gun Factory. With the addition of the laboratories of the Chemist to the War Department - a post created in 1854 - this organisation of the Arsenal persisted throughout the 19th Century.

No separate establishments existed specifically to do research, design and development. Nevertheless, from the earliest days, epoch making advances were made, such as the transition from solid round shot fired from a muzzle loader to the explosive filled shell fired from a breech-loading gun, the replacement of gunpowder by cordite as the propellant and the early 19th Century experiments with artillery rockets.



*Wheelers Shop, Woolwich Arsenal.*

By the beginning of the 20th Century, the increase in activity in the armament world, the growing complexity of weapons and in particular the serious faults in the ammunition used by the British Army in the Boer War led to the establishment of the Chemical Research Department, Woolwich in 1907. This organisation was the first in the country to be entirely devoted to armament research; it covered explosives and pyrotechnics, propellants, ballistics and materials for

armaments. It was the direct and recognisable forerunner of the Armament Research Establishment.

In 1915, the engineering design and development of weapons was concentrated progressively into a separate department but the unified Armament Design Establishment began to assume its final shape in 1922 when the design facilities of the three factories at Woolwich (the Royal Gun Factory, The Royal Carriage Department and the Royal Laboratory) and one at Enfield were amalgamated into the Design Department.



*Trimmers' Shop Woolwich Arsenal.  
(All photos were added to original story)*

# *A South East Londoner's Story*

*Henry R.J. Pilott*



*Anderson shelters being delivered to residents.*

The day the war broke out my family were sitting out in the garden sunshine, awaiting Chamberlain's broadcast. The actual declaration was somewhat of an anticlimax and accepted as inevitable. Hardly had his closing words sunk in when the air raid warning sounded all over London, which brought us all back to reality.

We looked skywards in the expectation of seeing vast fleets of enemy bombers, but the sky was empty and an eerie silence pervaded because all the traffic had stopped and people had rushed to the nearest air raid shelter. The Government had been issuing Anderson Shelters to householders with gardens but ours had not been delivered. We therefore had nowhere to run. We all began to speak in subdued tones, as if the enemy might hear, or neighbours might realise our unspoken fears. After a short time, which seemed to be ages, the 'All Clear' sounded and we all were relieved.

Air Raid Precautions (A.R.P.) had been implemented and I helped my dad make wooden frames covered with black cloth to place up at the windows in the living room and the front room each night to comply with the black-out regulations. In the bedrooms my mother removed the electric light bulb, apart from her own bedroom, which had very heavy curtains.

When our Anderson Shelter arrived (which I understood was to cost around £5 but was dependent upon how much one earned) it was in a dozen pieces and my dad had to dig a large 3ft deep hole in the garden as far away from the house as possible. The curved pieces, which formed the sides and top were bolted together and sunk into the ground. The end pieces completed the ensemble, leaving a 2ft square opening as an entrance. Once erected

and the joints made waterproof the whole lot was covered with 18 inches of earth. I remember my brother Vic was down from college for a visit and offered us copious advice about how to erect it, but little physical assistance. Many shelters were later made more liveable with concrete and carpeted floors, electric light and bunk beds. However, for the first period of the war, ours, like many others, became a place to put unwanted household items.

Air Raid Wardens had been enlisted and ours lived four doors away, a Mr Potter, who was normally a postman. He soon became full of his own importance, to the annoyance of his neighbours. Initially, in the absence of official equipment and information, Mr Potter was the local self-appointed source of what to do. He got my father to erect a wooden stand in the front garden with a painted tabletop, which was supposed to indicate by colour change the presence of gas. The fact that anyone noticing this change was, by that time, gassed, seemed to be missed. We had, before the war started, been issued with gas masks at Church Manorway School and were supposed to carry them wherever we went, but, very quickly, they were put in the cupboard and forgotten about. We were advised to cover our windows in brown sticky paper to prevent flying glass and it was Mr Potter who said that our strips went in the wrong direction. My dad was given a stirrup pump (a kind of water pump) to put out fires, for safekeeping.



*Stirrup pump practice WWII.*

After a few months we began to notice the Barrage Balloons going up in the sky around us, about one to two miles apart. The 800 or so balloons around London were raised whenever

there was risk of a raid and sometimes they stayed up the whole day. I stood on Plumstead Common looking across to the centre of London and could see these slow moving, clumsy, elephantine objects as far as the eye could see. They were prone to damage by lightning and were at first brought down whenever a storm was brewing.

Later in 1940, when the number of balloons was increased, the nearest one was 500 yards away, alongside the railway line on a spare piece of ground, and operated by half a dozen RAF Airmen from a large lorry. They lived in a nearby Nissen hut and seemed to have a cushy life.

When my brother Stan left school he worked as a messenger in Siemen's factory in Charlton and then, about a year later, he started an apprenticeship in the Woolwich Arsenal as a Turner and Fitter. He was given a new bicycle to go to work on, which made me very jealous as I hadn't even a second-hand bicycle and had to cadge the use of my dad's old bone shaker. My friends had been evacuated along with my school to Bearstead near Maidstone, Kent, and those children remaining in London were left without any schooling. Within a very short time, as the expected air raids did not materialise, many of my friends returned to their homes and school started again and even some of the teachers returned.

In May 1940 when the Germans broke through, I remember looking with apprehension at a map of France and the destruction of our army. With the debacle of Dunkirk we were prepared by the government-controlled radio with the idea that we might be invaded. All road signs were removed and anybody asking directions was automatically suspect. Tales of spies and German parachutists dressed up in nun's clothes abounded. I, with my friends, joined in the hunt and followed anyone who looked suspicious. Nuns were not frequently seen in Plumstead, but any we met were subjected to being tailed. Although we were often sure we had uncovered nests of spies, we never got up sufficient pluck to report our suspicions to the local coppers. I remember discussing with a friend Alan Blake, who lived nearby, what we could do if the Germans invaded, but, apart from a vague idea of decamping to Abbey Woods, we came to few conclusions.

When the Battle of Britain started, I saw little of the aeroplane dogfights, but later in early September, the daylight raids on London began. The weather was marvellous with cloudless skies and we stood in the garden after the siren had sounded. Within a short time the sky was criss-crossed with high-flying silver aircraft that looked like toys. We counted about 20 pass over, moving towards the centre of London, and then we could see smaller silver objects falling. These, we later realised, were bombs. Some Barrage balloons were also falling, flaming drunkenly like grotesque dancers. We had no thought of taking shelter and were fascinated by the aerial battle above. Later in the day we saw our fighters attacking subsequent waves of bombers and we heard low flying aircraft in the vicinity. We later realised that many of the bombs had fallen on the Woolwich Arsenal and the Docks. Later that night the bombers returned again and soon the whole sky was filled with a red glow of the fires that raged in the docks. From our front door, as we looked towards Woolwich and the Arsenal we could see the reflection of the huge fires that had been started further up river.

From the first week in September we had continuous day and night raids for about three weeks, then the bombers came only at night and we had heavy raids every night until the

middle of November. We had bought a Manchester terrier bitch dog during 1938 and after the first few nights she would sense the onset of a raid and let us know by howling at least 20 minutes before the air raid warning went off. She was unable to stand the anti-aircraft guns going off and the bomb explosions and unfortunately we had to have her put down. During this period each night I would crawl under the dining room table (the shelter was full of water and unusable) praying that I would get through the night.

One night the street was showered with incendiary bombs and my dad with other neighbours who were on fire watching duty went outside to deal with one that had fallen in the road. There was my father arguing with a neighbour about the best way to deal with it. Pick it up in a shovel and put it in a bucket or put sand over it and let it burn. He wouldn't have done this later in the war, as the Germans began dropping explosive incendiaries. A number of houses had been hit, including that of my friend David Edwards. The 2lb bomb had gone through his roof into the front bedroom and his father, with the aid of neighbours, managed to put most of the fire out from inside. However, this didn't stop the AFS (Auxiliary Fire Service) rushing round and causing more damage by breaking the top-floor windows and throwing out all his furniture. The next day I found a large 6ft container for all these incendiary bombs in our garden.

One morning we woke up to find an unexploded bomb had fallen into the front garden of a house eight doors away. The street was cleared and we all had to move to a Rest Centre that had been set up at Plumstead High Street School. There were so many unexploded bombs around that it was impossible for the army to deal with them all. Many went off within a few hours and then one could move back. It seemed to me we were in the Rest Centre for weeks but I know it was only days. The place was crowded and many of the people who were in poor physical and mental condition had come from Silvertown, in East London, having been bombed out. My father had not been able to get to work for some days. He set off on his bicycle to find what had happened in Bow. He returned to tell us that his factory had been badly bombed and no work was possible. The raids during each night continued and we were all crammed into the basement of the school, which had been strengthened outside with sandbags and bricked-up windows. Local cheer-leaders (including our own Mr Potter) got people singing songs to keep up their courage and take their minds off the destruction taking place outside. After about a week, because the bomb in our road had not gone off, my mother decided to chance it and we moved back to our house. The road was still closed to traffic and we were warned that there was still a risk of an explosion. After another week or so others moved back and the bomb was forgotten and the hole was filled in. When we had returned home because my dad was unable to go back to work to his old firm, he was directed for a short time to work on bomb-damaged houses, covering up the blasted windows and roofs with tarpaulins to keep out the rain

Some years later, in 1946 after the war had ended, an unexploded bomb that had also been forgotten exploded near the Elephant and Castle, killing some children. As a result the numerous unexploded bombs, including our own, were dug up and dealt with. In our case the bomb had gone down about 10ft and was still alive.



At this time I was not attending school as the normal day-to-day routines had been disrupted and teachers were not available. I was not getting any proper sleep at night. There were half-time lessons at my old school but there was no compunction to go and I missed months of valuable schooling. My mother decided that I could do with a rest from the bombing and sent me off to live with my aunt Rose in Burnt Oak. Although this area was still in London, and Hendon Airport and the surrounding aircraft factories were targets, the German bombers did not automatically fly over the area on their way to Central London. We heard the sirens each night but it was rare that bombs dropped in the area and I was able to sleep in a proper bed and attend the local school without disruption.

My aunt was a widow (my Uncle Joe had died in 1940 as the result of wounds he received in the 1st World War) but still had two children of school age, Irene, then aged fifteen and Arthur, aged six (my cousin Joey was in the army and had gone through Dunkirk.) I settled down well and my aunt was easy-going if a bit fussy. She was, however, liberal with pocket money and trips to the cinema. The first thing she did when I arrived was to take me to Hendon Central WVS Centre where they kitted me out with new clothes on the basis that I had been bombed out. I liked living with my aunt and started school in Burnt Oak. When the teacher introduced me to the class she told them I had been bombed out so I was the centre of attraction for a while. I told them that I came from Dover to increase the attention (everybody had heard of Dover, as it was being shelled from France across the Channel, but nobody knew of Woolwich) so my teacher was a bit confused. Whilst I was living there a German plane was shot down and placed on view, on the site of the present Burnt Oak Library. We had to pay a penny to see it. I was doing well at school, but I think my mother was not too happy that I had settled in so easily, and so, after a few months, she sent my brother Stan to bring me home.

Although the raids had not ceased, they had decreased in frequency and Stan told me the air raid shelter had been made comfortable, with bunk beds and carpet on the floor and a proper front door to keep out the cold. I started back to school and we made the best of the raids by sleeping in the shelter each night. Although we had a number of bombs fall in the vicinity during the "Blitz" we were lucky that we lost only windows and a few tiles off the roof. The blast of the bombs was sufficient to rock the foundations of the house and caused a vertical crack to appear in the sidewall. One large bomb, which fell in Church Manorway, uncovered many graves in St Nicholas' Churchyard and scattered bones all over the place. A

number of incendiaries failed to ignite or did not completely burn through, if they fell on open damp land. My friends and I found one half burnt, which I took home and kept in the garden shed. Later in the war we filed bits off of it, as the filings, being made of magnesium, could be made into very good fireworks. We never thought about how dangerous this practice was.

The wartime clothes rationing imposed a "make do and mend" attitude on everyone and luckily my mother was very good at knitting and machining. She bought a hand-operated circular sock machine so that every scrap of spare wool could be used to an advantage. She made all my school trousers and jumpers until I got into senior school and I often went to school in trousers that she had patched, but other children were in the same boat so there was little comment.

We rarely went out at this time and my family would often sit down to play card games in the evening, and Crib was our favourite. My mother was not a very good loser and if my dad was winning, she would protest that he was sitting in her chair and make him change places.

*Editors footnote: Photos were added to the original story.*

*'WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at [bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](http://bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar)'*



# *A Wing And Some Prayers*

*This story was submitted by Simon Harris and has been added to this book*

*on behalf of Brian Batley.*

My earliest wartime recollection was the day of a relative's funeral at Barham on 31st August 1940. The funeral itself went quietly but when we were on the way home, the air raids and the dogfights started.

All the way home bombs were dropping, anti-aircraft guns were firing and aeroplanes were coming down. When we got to Repository Road in Woolwich, home to the Royal Artillery Depot, a Spitfire ablaze in the middle of the street stopped us. We had to turn round and travel another route to my grandfather's public house in Powis Street.

On arrival home my mother, who had stayed behind to look after my younger siblings, said she had seen an aircraft wing falling slowly with a swinging movement. Years after the war, I discovered that the Spitfire was flown by F.O. Waterson of 603 squadron. He had hit an ME109, lost his wing, and crashed in Woolwich. The other plane came down in Plumstead and I can remember having gone there with my father the next day to see the wreckage in Anne Street. Both pilots were killed in the crash.

Years later I saw the wing of the spitfire in the Battle of Britain museum at Hawkinge. It was a real surprise and brought back many memories.

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# *A Young Boy Remembers The War Years In Plumstead*

*Chris Kitchenham*

I was born in Plumstead (at St Nicholas Hospital), in September of 1938. I don't remember too much about the first two or three years, but my mum and dad lived at 4 Ennis Road with dad's mum and my aunty Pru. Dad was in the Civil Defence at that time, as well as his regular job. When I was two, during one of the raids, our house was bombed. Thanks to the shelter my dad had built in the back yard, we survived, but a good friend and neighbour, Kitty, was killed. After this we all moved to 8 Ennis Road, another of the terraced houses.

The war went on for quite a while, and I have memories of hearing the siren and running down to the shelter, usually with dinner plates filled with gravy (because they always



*Mum Kitchenham c.1956.*

seemed to bomb at dinner time!), and chuckling at the "Bloody Germans, why can't they wait" comments. Aunty Pru had a great sense of hearing, and could always tell us, before it happened, that the sirens were about to sound.

Once we were in the shelter during a raid and you could hear the Doodlebugs, and we learned that it was really OK if you could hear them as they went by, but if you heard them 'cut-out', that was a potential problem since at that point they fell to their targets.

Now, while this all seems very dramatic, as a child I just thought that's the way things were. I thought it was quite normal to have a bombsite as a playground, quite normal. At the nursery school in Herbert Road us kids would scurry around looking for pieces of shrapnel. A real treasure was a warm piece! A favourite toy we made was a 'parachute', which was made with a 'hanky,' some string, and a stone for weighting it down.

After the war I can remember sitting around the dinner table for our Sunday meal, and sometimes the conversation would turn to stories of the war. Stories of how one of the few things that didn't



*Chris Kitchenham being held by his "Nan" Ada Jane Kitchenham.*

them 'cut-out', that was a potential problem since at that point they fell to their targets.



*Chris's Aunt Winifred Kempton, with Ann Bowman in the background, at 8 Ennis Road, around 1958.*

disappear "Down the Hole" when the bomb hit, was the wireless, as it was found because the blast had turned it on and it was playing merrily away under all the rubble! But what was strange, in retrospect, was that though the stories seemed very sombre, the humorous aspects of the story would always come out, leaving mum, dad, nan, Pru and I laughing. I suspect that this was the attitude that brought the Londoners through those terrible times.

When I was seven years old, dad, who had been in India for about four years in the Army, came home. I felt I knew him, because his picture was always on the mantelpiece and mum used to tell me all about him, but now he was actually coming home, and I was going to meet him. We knew approximately when he was going to arrive, and although it was past my bedtime, I was watching out of the window when this tanned chap, with a kit-bag on his back, looking just like his picture, came up the road; spotted my face in the window; grinned and waved.



*Maisie and Jack Kitchenham holidaying with their friends Harry and Glad Cheeseman in Greatstone 1954. (Left to right, Maisie Kitchenham, Harry Cheeseman, Gladys Cheeseman & Jack Kitchenham.)*

I rushed headlong for the door and gave him the first of many, many hugs. When things settled down a bit, and us still at 8 Ennis, nan, with ration books in hand, would shop at the RACS (Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society) or in 'Birds Nest Hollow', both within walking distance of home.

With fond memories of the wonderful places like 'Bett's Fish Shop,' Charlie Sturgess Barber shop, Mr Dalladay the cobbler, Alderton baker's shop, Robbins shop, The 'Star pub' and of course 'The Ship' where mum and dad would enjoy a couple of hours with friends on a Friday night.

I don't know why dad and I went to the Woodman that afternoon; his usual weekend spots were the 'Whodie' (The 'Who'd of thought it' pub) and the 'Ship Inn'. He didn't tell me, but perhaps he had heard the rumour that Freddie Mills was going to be there. Anyway, he joined me at a school cricket match on the Common, and afterwards, we walked up to the Woodman. When we got there it was obvious that something was different. There was excitement in the air. Soon we heard that, indeed, Freddie Mills was there and Dad thought that perhaps we could get his autograph. But when you have just left a cricket match, what do you ask "The Champ" to sign? No autograph book, no paper, but, I did have my cricket bat and that is what a puzzled Freddie signed for me! I was one proud young fellow.



*Standing in the doorway of the Woodman Public House with my dad. This is where I was able to get the autograph of Freddie Mills, the champion boxer.*

Dad and I would take a walk up the Red Road, to Shrewsbury Park, near Shooters Hill, just about every Sunday morning. After a while dad and a few of his friends started to play tennis on Plumstead Common on Sunday mornings and I would join him. After the men had played their game I was sometimes allowed to hit the ball with them. Thus my introduction to tennis, which I still continue to play today. By the way, it was this group that circulated a petition requesting two additional (hard) courts on Plumstead Common. They were successful, as it happened. After tennis I would get treated to an ice cream from Butlers ice cream wagon, parked on the Common across from the "Ship".

After a year or so, mum, dad and I moved to Highgrove, still in Plumstead, in what I believe were then called "Council Flats," but of course we still stayed in close contact with nan and Pru.

I'm still a teenager at this time, and exploring two different worlds.

On the one hand, every Friday night, auntie Pru and I would go to the Royal Artillery Theatre in Woolwich and, for a shilling, watch some wonderful theatre in a seat that was then described as, 'up in the gods'. On the other hand, in Highgrove, again, I met some people who affected the rest of my life.

On the one hand, every Friday night, auntie Pru and I would go to the Royal Artillery Theatre in Woolwich



*Ethel King with son Graham, c1957.*



*Nurse Val Carey outside St Nicholas Hospital, c1957.*

Jim and Ethel (Effie) King, who were white, had raised three boys of their own, then adopted Rita and Graham, two kids that today would be called 'Black'. See: *Rita King Story*.

Val Carey, who lived up at number 85, and Michael 'Mick' Marsh, and I became the best of friends.

The first year at Highgrove, I was still attending Timbercroft School and was an avid member of the football and cricket teams. The second year there we

had taken the exams, after which I started to go to the "Roan School for Boys" on Maze Hill in Blackheath. Dennis Wray, a friend from 46 Tuam Rd, also went to the Roan.



*Timbercroft Football Team 1949/50.*

*Back row: Robin Wesley; Eddie Venables; Ray Kitchen; Mike Smith; Mr Hersey.*

*Mid. Row: Chris Kitchenham; Peter Costa; Dennis Wray; Flicky Fletcher; Gerald Collins.*

*Front row: not sure; Graham Lee; not sure.*

After the Roan, in 1955, my folks made the big decision,

to go to Canada; then, after about a year and a-half there, another decision: to join mum's brother in the Boston area of the US. And that's where I live today with my wife of 38 years, Peggy. Our son Scott and his wife have given us a couple of grandchildren, Christopher, now three, and Abbi, who is one. (Oct. 2006)

### **Aunt Pru leaves Plumstead for a while**

This is a follow-up on the life of Ethel Kitchenham.

As previously mentioned, she was Aunt Pru to us, and she spent 99% of her life in Plumstead. The other 1% of her life however, was remarkable.

She was born in 1898, and spent some of her early working years "in Service", that is to say, getting paid a low wage for helping to look after someone else's house, or cooking etc.

Later, she worked at the RACS jam factory in Abbey Wood, and by 1933 was a forewoman there.

At that time she was asked to be part of a delegation that had been invited to Russia to be part of the May Day celebration and to observe the progress of their "Social Reconstruction Program" they called it. The visit was to be from April 21st until May 28<sup>th</sup>.

She kept a very detailed diary during this trip, and the trip itself, I think, was to demonstrate how the position of the "working class" had improved in terms of wages, benefits and in general, having a voice.

The details, as I said, were fascinating, going from the



*Aunt Ethel (who we called Aunt Pru) As a younger woman, Ethel, born Ethel Nellie Frances, found that she needed glasses, so she made an appointment and in a couple of weeks went to pick them up. When she got home, she was sitting in the chair trying out her new glasses by reading a book. At one point Nan looked up and said something to the effect of "Well isn't that the picture of prudence." From that point on she was called Prudence which was later, affectionately, shortened to Pru by the family.*

organization of the ships staff, to the rebuilding of various factories, steel mills and electricity generating plants and the subsequent improvement, in not only the out-put of these places but the improvements in wages and benefits to the workers.

Well, after that trip, she came back to Plumstead and continued to work through the war years. After my parents and I moved to High Grove she would visit us there to bring over anything she thought we might need and have a bit of fun with us.

She and I went regularly to the Royal Arsenal repertory theatre on Friday nights, up in "The gods" for a bob.

Then, in 1955, mum, dad, and I moved to Canada then later, in 1957 to Massachusetts in the US. This prompted Pru's next adventure. She knew she had a standing invitation to come to visit us, so after we had become settled, she got on a ship in Southampton and sailed to the United States. I met her in New York, and after she passed through customs etc. we walked from the dock area towards Grand Central Station, where we were to take a train to Boston.

During that walk Pru spied a window cleaner on Fifth Ave and by the time I realized she wasn't still next to me they were having a good old chat.

We lived about 20 miles south of Boston in a town called Randolph and because we were all working Pru was on her own during the weekdays. After about 2 weeks, it was fun to go up to the centre of town with her; she knew every-one.

Late, in 1968, she made another trip over, this time by air, and then Peg and I got married.

She's no longer with us, but is remembered in our hearts.



# A Young Girl's War Time Memories

Miriam Bastable (nee Crooks)

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When war was declared I was seven years old and was aged thirteen when it finished. I also had two sisters, Dorothy and Sylvia. We lived at Waverley Cottages, near Woolwich Common.

The day the war broke out I can remember the neighbours talking to each other about it in our road.

As the bombing steadily grew worse we were evacuated, along with our mother. My dad

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stayed behind and carried on working with the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, as a driver.

We were evacuated to a village called Shalden, near to Aldershot. While we were away our house in Waverley Cottages got bombed and, when the bombing eventually eased, we came back to a house in Cheriton Drive, at number 13, the next to last house at the top, on the left.

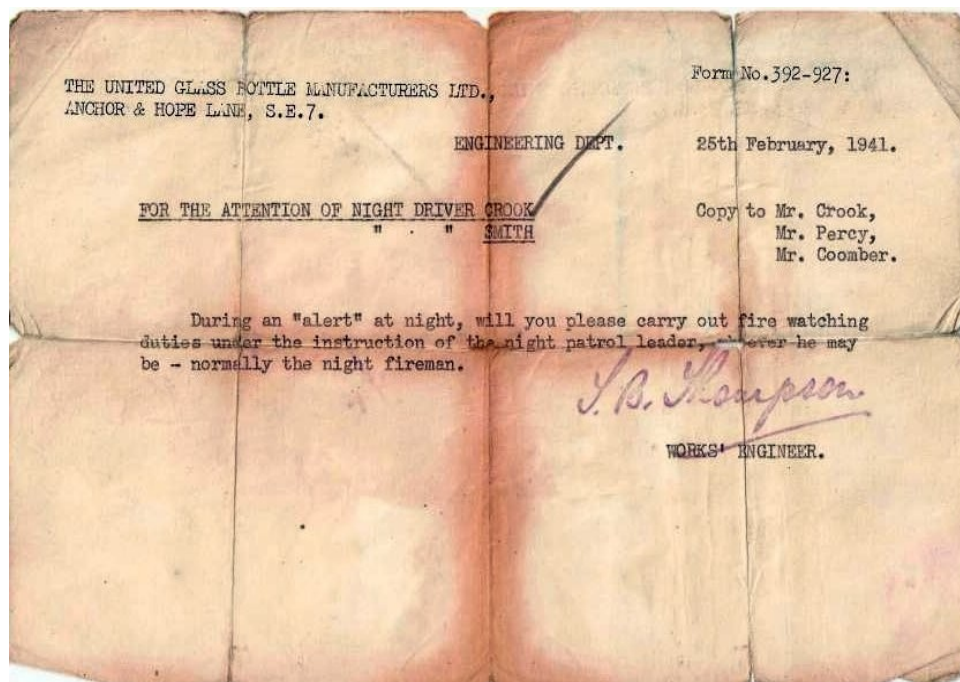
I went to school at the Slade School. I think that I must have been about 11 years old when I went to Plum Lane School.

I can remember that if we were walking to or from school and there was an air raid warning, ladies would come out of their homes and ask us kids if we would want to take cover in their homes and shelters, and so we would go into their houses till the all clear sounded.

I think it was one Saturday, and it was lunchtime. The air raid siren went. Dad always said to us kids to go down to the cellar under our house when this happened. These instructions were given to us to do if he was away somewhere working, and so we did this. I remember a time when we were in the cellar and we could hear a doodlebug (VI flying bomb) coming. My mother was looking out of the cellar door, where we were sheltering, and said to us, "All get down". I threw myself on top of my sister Sylvia and the whole place shook. There was lots of dust and when we came out of the cellar all the slates were off the roof of our house and all the glass in the windows were all blown in with the blast!

The Air Raid Wardens came round and we went into the Anderson shelter, situated in the garden, till the 'all clear' siren sounded. We didn't sleep in the Anderson shelter because it was really very damp.

That night we slept at the Slade School. I think that it must have only been for a couple of nights. We were then evacuated up north to Sheffield.



*Fire Watching. Letter of instructions, 1941.*

I can remember going to the Woolwich Council Offices and being given labels, which were then tied onto our clothes. We all carried our gas masks. Once again, my Mother and I and my two sisters were evacuated (Victor, my brother, was not born until 1945).

As far as I can remember, we were taken by bus to a railway station, somewhere in London. On the way we had to get out of the bus and go into an air raid shelter, situated above ground, as there was an air raid. Whilst we were in the shelter there was a boy, who we didn't know, and he was saying, "Don't shut the door". His mum said, "Poor boy, he had been buried in a previous bombing."

We got on a train and eventually arrived in Sheffield, where we were taken by bus to a church or a school hall, I can't remember which, and they gave us a meal.

People came and offered to billet some of the children and families. No one wanted us, as there were four of us. But eventually we were taken to a small cottage and were billeted with a lady and her grown up son. We attended school whilst there. We eventually returned to our home at 13 Cheriton Drive and I lived there until I married in 1952.



When we were at The Slade School, before I was 11 years old, a lady used to come and bring



knitting that we did for the Merchant Seamen. The wool was grey and I can remember taking home wool to knit a jersey.

The other thing that I remember is that my dad used to do fire watching at the United Glass Bottle factory in Charlton. He said that one night they were on duty and they rushed out with stirrup pumps as there were incendiary bombs dropping, all of a sudden the man in front of him fell into a crater that had filled up with water. Dad said that it was very dark and the man's hat floated on the

water. Dad said that he had never laughed so much. You had to have a sense of humour in those times.

Another thing was that the men came around and took all the railings off of the front walls of houses. They went for the war effort.

As children we used to go and collect paper from houses and take it back to school at the Slade and that was called 'salvage'. (Like the kids in the photo above)



*Miriam and Peter Bastable's wedding in 1952, St Margaret's Church.*

*My sister Sylvia Crooks is standing extreme left and my other sister Dorothy Crooks is the bridesmaid standing next to me. My brother Victor is in the middle of the children in the front row.*

Also, at Plum Lane School, I can remember that we used to get our feet measured and get extra clothing coupons if you had certain sized feet.

My two aunts had coats made out of blankets. This was because there was hardly anything to buy in the shops.

Around about 1950 the sweets came off ration and they had to put them back on again as the shops just sold out so quickly. Then the ration allowance was gradually increased until people became used to being able to buy them. I lived at 13 Cheriton Drive until I married in 1952.

St Margaret's Church wasn't there when I went back to England in 1970.

We emigrated to New Zealand in 1956. Victor also lives in Wellington, New Zealand, same as I do. (December, 2006)

# *Aeroplane Crash Over Plumstead*

*Colin Weightman*

I remember one day, whilst walking home after school from Conway Primary School, we were walking up Orissa Road, alongside the back of the old Beasley's Brewery buildings.

I heard the loud throbbing sound of lots of aeroplanes' engines. Excitedly I looked up and saw lots of planes; they were all flying in formation. Suddenly, two of the planes collided with each other, and then, it all seemed in to be in slow motion, wings and pieces of fuselage broke off and began to fall, spinning down to earth, followed by the two crippled planes.

Being a young child, I wondered if what I was looking at was for real! Later on, though, the evening papers were full of the tragic story, with big bold headlines reporting this spectacular air accident.

From memory, I believe that one plane crashed into the Thames and the other into the Plumstead Marshes, with the loss of at least one pilot's life.

I think I was around nine years old at the time, so this happened around 1953. Maybe they were practising their fly past routine for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II which was held on the 6th of June 1953.

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# *Alan Gibbs Remembers*

*Alan Gibbs*



*Conway Road Infants School, 1950.*

*I am the fourth boy from the left in the back row.*

*I can recall the caretaker ringing the school bell every morning. In the Infants we were given a spoonful of malt every morning, as we went in.*

*Photo: Alan Gibbs.*

I lived on Ancona Road and attended the Infant and Primary School at Conway.

In the Primary School we had to do Country Dancing. On the days we had P.E. (Physical Education) if you had no plimsolls to wear during the P.E. you had to go to a cupboard in the hall and hope to find a pair that fitted you.

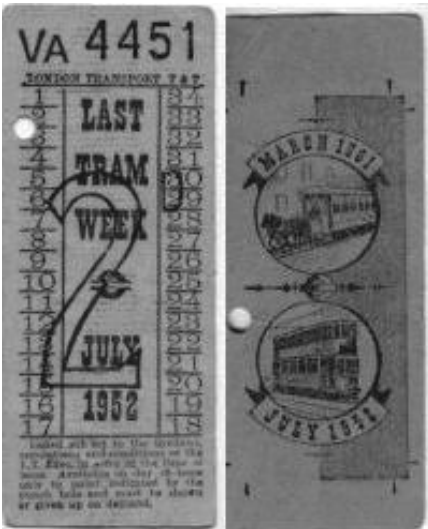
At Christmas time we were taken around to the church next to the school in Hector Street, for a Carol Service. (This church is now a Roman Catholic Church)

I can't recall all the teachers names, but the few I can are: Mrs Moore, who taught the Infants, Miss Baker and Mrs Barnaby; Mr Mockridge, was the football master, he later became Headmaster of Alexander McLeod School in Abbey Wood; Mr Lovatt, who always wore a three piece suit and had a pencil moustache; Mr Jenkins, who was in charge of the school band; and Mr Bull, the Headmaster.

I went to East Plumstead Baptist Church for Sunday School, the old church on the corner of Griffin and Brewery Roads, and then later I went there to Cubs (14th Woolwich group). In those days we used to march to Woolwich through the streets on the annual St George's Day Parade.

On leaving Conway School I then attended Wickham Lane Secondary Modern School for Boys. I remember the annual cross-country races that we ran through Bostall Woods. We were put into 'Houses,' each house had a different colour. The house names were,

Abbey, King, and School. I was in Abbey. Some of the schoolteachers I recall are, Mr Whitworth, who took Religious Instruction, Mr Hough, Book craft & Gardening, Mr War, History, Mr Arround, Woodwork, Mr Bennet, Metalwork and Mr Waites, Music.



*The Last Tram tickets!*

I remember when my dad took me to see the last tram. We stood on the Plumstead rail bridge as the very last tram rattled past us. It was all lit up (sad day). They were good, those old trams.

I remember they had controls at both ends of the tram and the backs of the seats could be pushed backwards and forwards, for whichever direction the tram was going. No need to turn the tram around; quite clever.

On a Sunday we would have winkles for tea. We each had a pin ready to winkle out the tasty morsel in its little shell. Before you took them out though you had to take a small black top off of them. My sister used to get these little black things and lick and stick them on her face to make them look like beauty spots.



# Alfred John Boon, 1910 -1998

## His early life in Plumstead



Alfred John Boon

My grandfather, James Boon, was a dockyard labourer who, I believe, became a waterman or lighterman. I was told that he was involved in rescue operations of the *Princess Alice* pleasure boat, which sank in Woolwich Reach. There is a memorial in Woolwich Cemetery, Kings Highway, Plumstead. See: *The Great Thames Disaster*.

After their marriage in 1873, James and my grandmother, Amelia Mead, lived at 54 Burrage Road, Plumstead. By the time of the 1881 census they were living at 3 Orchard Street, Woolwich, where they remained until at least 1901. They both died at 65 Elm Street, Plumstead. I don't know where they lived between 1901 and 1912. James died in 1912 and Amelia in 1915. Both are buried in the King's Highway Cemetery.

James and Amelia had seven children. I did not know John, b.1876, Amelia, b.1887 and William, b.1889 existed until I obtained the records. They must have died young. Their other children were:

**Mabel.** Married Peter Mortimer, a Scot and professional footballer that played for Chatham and Woolwich Arsenal (now Arsenal F.C.) I last saw them in Springburn Road, Glasgow in 1942, where he worked as a liner (sign writer) on the railway.

**Lillian.** This aunt I knew best, as she lived with us for some time. She worked as a pastry cook with Chapman Bakers, Plumstead Road. She had a child, Lillian (Pip). She later became housekeeper to a widow in Swiss Cottage, and subsequently married and lived in North London. Pip was raised from birth by my mother, and of course lived with us.

**James Edward Boon**, my father, was born at 3 Orchard St. 31st July 1877. He went to St Patrick's School. He married Helena Downes (then living at 10 Down Street, Plumstead) at St Patrick's Church, Griffin Road, Plumstead, on 8 April 1901.



Plumstead Working Men's Club, Cycling Section. James Edward Boon is third from the left.

Helena was the daughter of Martin Downes, a soldier, by then deceased, and his wife Bridget, and was born in 1876 in Pendennis Castle, Cornwall. Bridget later lived with her daughter Ann in Crescent Road, Plumstead. She would visit each of her locally based children, who would each give her a shilling a week. There were no Army pensions for widows in those days.

My father, James, was employed as a labourer in the shell foundry at Woolwich Arsenal. He later became a moulder. I used to take his dinner to him in the shell foundry at Woolwich Arsenal during the First World War. I was only about seven or eight years of age and was always



*Plumstead Working Men's Club Cycling Section.  
James Edward Boon is towards the left with the striped tie.*

frightened that they might 'blow' a furnace while I was there. The noise and fire were terrifying.

My father was a keen cyclist and one time captain of the Plumstead Common Working Men's Club Cycling Section. They would go as far as the

I.o.W., Margate, Yarmouth, starting Saturday afternoon and returning by Sunday evening, weather no object. He was a competitive walker, and also won a few rowing competitions. A foot-high cup was cemented onto his grave, but was stolen a few weeks later. He was an excellent swimmer, and would swim across the Thames as a schoolboy. He told us of the 'floaters', which he used to blow in front of him, or dive under. He was a very good ballroom dancer; I think he won a few competitions. One of his friends was Charles Buchan, with whom he played football. Charles Buchan played for Arsenal and England.

My father worked at the Arsenal for over fifty years and suffered from asthma, caused by the sulphur fumes. On retirement in 1942 he received about £100 and a State pension. He was also recommended for the Imperial Service Medal, but did not receive it.

My mother had died on 1 January 1938 of cerebral thrombosis, and in 1942 my father married Gert McGeary, a widow, who was the daughter of Frederick and Gertrude Newman, who lived at 69 Elm Street. Fred was an engine driver at Woolwich Arsenal.

Gert had been a supervisor in Munitions during the Great War, and manager of Henson's Child Clothing Factory, Lakedale Road, Plumstead. The Hewsons lived opposite us in Elm St, starting their business there.

My father returned to work at the Arsenal towards the end of the war, and died on 26 May 1947

from cardiac arrest.

I had two brothers and a sister, James, Helena and William.

James was an apprentice instrument maker with Siemens Brothers, Charlton. He was subsequently employed with Brown Bros, Acton, and

Colliers, Burrage Road, Plumstead. Colliers, now extinct, manufactured the Matchless and the A.J.S. motorbike, and three-wheeled cars. It started in Burrage Road as a cycle repair shop, where I used to buy parts. He was also employed at Oliver Pell Control, Burrage Road. He was manager of a department there during the war, and was a corporal in the Home Guard. He was a member of the YMCA and helped a lot at social and athletic clubs. He played football as a goalkeeper and cricket for Charlton Park. A good swimmer, he had life saving medals. In later life he was keen on bowls. He ran a football club, Woodville, two senior sides and a minor. They were regarded as the youth teams of Charlton Athletic, and some of the players were promoted to that team.

He was on the staff of Charlton, unpaid I think. I can't remember the leagues they played in, but they won many trophies. The minor team was well known in the London area, together with Woolwich Army Boys teams, Dockland Settlement, Eton Manor, etc. Jim



*Woodville Football Club. Jim Boon, the manager, is back right, with the glasses.*



*In the Oliver Pell football team, James Edward Boon's son, Alfred John Boon is in the centre holding the ball, which suggests he was captain.*

*Standing L-R: Coulter, Upwood, Ashdown, Althans, Denmain, Paine, Alderman, Smith. Seated Crowley, Rainey, Boon, Fletcher, Garland.*

was a good gymnast and belonged to St Brides Institute, Blackfriars. He also joined Chester's Circus as an acrobat for a short time.

**Bill** was a clerk who worked for Wolfe Bros, power tool manufacturers, Stamford St, Blackfriars, and his last position was as a submarine cable tester at STC, Woolwich. He was also a good footballer and turned out for Erith and Belvedere, in the London League, amongst other teams. During the war he was a clerk in the R.E.M.E. He married Winifred Smith, from Norwood, in 1941. They had one son, Michael. Bill died on 10th September 1974, a couple of weeks short of his 63rd birthday.

**Helena** was the favourite with my parents, living a sheltered life. She had a tubercular elbow as a child, but it did not affect her in later life. She did a term of employment as a nursemaid to a Jewish family, and worked for a short period at Peak Frean's factory at Deptford. She married Sydney Martin in 1930 at St Patrick's Church, Plumstead. Sid enlisted as an apprentice engineer in the RAF, and I think he was a Squadron Leader when he died of thrombosis in Tripoli, in about 1955. He was a very good athlete, turning out for the RAF at rugby. He was a Mason and I think belonged to the same Lodge as my brother Jim. He bunked at RAF Manston with J.H. Ross (the pseudonym used by Lawrence of Arabia, T E Lawrence, when he enlisted in the RAF).

At one time I went to stay with my aunt, Catherine Synan née Downes, in Andover, Hampshire. Her daughter Frances was nursemaid to Sheila, daughter of Fred Winter, stable jockey for Maurice Hartigan at Weyhill Stables. As I have been mad on horses from my infant days, and had quite a lot to do with them, I was more than delighted to get to know Mr Winter. My ambition had always been to be a jockey, and my size and weight were just suitable. I was 70lbs at 14. At every opportunity



*Chester's Circus, Elm Street during the Silver Jubilee 1935.*

I would go with Mr Winter to the stables. The staff would give me a leg-up on the hacks, and let me mount racehorses at the walk. I can still remember three of them, Sewing Machine, Clyno and Breeze. I was offered a chance as a stable lad, when I finished school, at Weyhill, or I could pick another stable. If I were satisfactory I would be apprenticed. There had been some racehorse owners around the Woolwich area, and I had been offered a place in the stables by them, so had always thought that this is where I would end up. Nobody at that time seemed to object. But when I returned to Plumstead my mother would not entertain it because her brother-in-law, who was then a stud groom in Devon, had had a hard time as a stable lad. It was useless to point out that that was in the Middle Ages, when all workers had hard times.

**65 Elm St** (later Elmly) was a six-room house with three bedrooms, and had elastic sides. Besides the family there was Lillian (Pip), the daughter of my aunt Lily. My mother looked after her from when she was a few months old until she left school at 14.



*Chester's Circus - Clowns tumbling in Elm Street, Plumstead.*

Another was Violet Bridges, older than me. Her mother, when she was dying, asked my mother to adopt her. She married a Sydney Higbee some time before the war. They had two children, Sheila and Betty. Violet's uncle, John Middleton, also lived with us for quite some time.

Another inhabitant was Olive Archer, a friend of Francis. She fell out with her parents, married an engineer from Siemens and died shortly after.

Kathleen Taylor was another refugee from parental warfare, a girlfriend of mine and a workmate of Francis. She married Terry Paul, an inspector with United Dairies.

The people living at 67 Elm St did a flit, leaving their lodgers, the Popes, mother, father and son, stranded in an empty house. My mother let them have our front room, supplying the furniture, on the understanding that it was only temporary. It took a year to get them out; more often than not they didn't pay any rent. My mother couldn't resist waifs and strays.

We had a good time though. There were always parties from when I was quite small. Parties went on all night, and sometimes lasted the weekend. They could be extended into several days at Christmas, going from house to house. The last time I saw No 65 it was a hole in the ground, waiting for a concrete monstrosity to be planted.

I left school at 14 and went to work with Gert's brother Ted at the old tram yard, Lakedale Road. He was employed by Fred Williams, who was once goalkeeper for Woolwich Arsenal, about the same time as my uncle played for them. He owned three public houses, The Brewery Tap, Plumstead, The Captain Digby Hotel, Kingsgate, Margate and The Spaniards, Hampstead Heath. He also had shares in Beasley's Brewery, Cheeseman's Stores, Lewisham and I suppose many more.

I went to The Spaniards one day with Ted. Tom Mix (old cowboy actor) was making a film there (Dick Turpin?). I was able to go into the stable and fondle his rather famous horse; was it Tony? Made my day.

Another bonus, I used to go into Beasley's Brewery and got to know the stable manager well. Shires pulled the drays. Of course I helped when I could in the boxes, and tried to persuade the manager to give me a job. He would laugh and say I was too small; one of the animals might tread on me. His stable staff being old employees, I don't think there was a vacancy. I believe he was pulling my leg. Ted's job was chauffeur, driver of the pub's delivery van, and the general maintenance of the vehicles. We both helped out in Arthur Hayward's garage that was in the tram yard. Learned to drive Model-T Fords, but was too young for a licence. Mr Hayward kept saying he would employ me, until I thought it was time for a move.

I don't know how I got the employment, but started work in the Inspection Department of Oliver Pell Control, Cambridge Place, Burrage Road, Plumstead. After I had been employed there some time I would go on a Saturday to the Strand, to service arc lamps. These, I think, were used in the Mall, by the Charing Cross

Electrical Company and manufactured by OPC. This experience obtained me a 100% mark in searchlights when I was at the Military College of Science. I learned quickly at OPC, and became quite adept in the use of electrical test instruments.

Charles Fricker, manager of the test department and I were far from amicable, although this did not prevent him from instructing me and giving me the best of the jobs.

One day I was rewiring electrical motors in the machine shop, assisted by a "new boy". Charlie arrived and accused the lad of idleness. I stuck up for the boy; it developed; I challenged Charlie to a bout of fisticuffs. Charlie refused because of his double hernia. He was the boss, so I departed. I took a job with Addis & Usherwood, grocers. I'm not sure why, but the manager, who was a friend, asked me. The hours were 8 - 8 Monday to Friday, half day Wednesday from 2 o'clock; Saturday 8 - 9. No football or cricket at the weekends. I was soon cheesed off, and when Mr Addiss started criticising me to the boss, that was that.

I had employment with two other firms, sometime before I entered the services: Labins, wine merchants of Piccadilly, servicing their bottling and corking machines in Waterloo, and The Electrical Apparatus Company, Vauxhall Road, where I worked on electrical controllers, including trams.

Mr Chapman, in charge of the instrument section at OPC invited me to return to the fold (it was that kind of firm). Mr Chapman was one of those persons who seemed to devote their lives to others. He got some high decoration later in his life; maybe a knighthood. (If not, he should have). He was a great fund-raiser, especially for The Miller Hospital, Greenwich. He chaired all the committees in the firm; Welfare, Sports, Entertainment etc. He was an officer in St John's Ambulance Brigade, and got me interested in First Aid. He was the most genuine gentleman I ever met. One thing I remember was when I tendered my resignation from one of the committees, because of criticism. He said he would accept it, but if everybody was to resign because people who are incapable of functioning in the job disapproved, nothing would ever get done. I withdrew my resignation.

I was unemployed for about a year during the Depression in the early thirties. I eventually obtained employment in Kolster-Brandes at Footscray, assembling wireless components. A come down, but I was thankful for any employment. I cycled from Plumstead to Footscray. This was seasonal, so it only lasted a few months. The Depression was easing; work became easier. I went to Standard Telephones Company, North Woolwich, assembling and testing telephone equipment. Not instrument making, but employment. I eventually returned to OPC, testing RAF equipment, including parts of Automatic Pilot. My old friend, Charlie Fricker, controlled this section and he soon got rid of me. Brother Jim was Charge Hand in the Instrument Shop at this time, so together with Mr Chapman I was soon back in the Instrument Dept.

Seeing the war coming, in 1939 I "signed on" with the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, later transferring to the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

# *An Arsenal Lad*

*Jack Vaughan*

Since this is an apprentice tale, let me say at the outset, that the title "lad" is misleading since the word was applied to a particular type of apprentice, as will be explained in due course.



*Fox and Hounds.*

My story starts as a seven year old at Foxhill School, the family home being at the top of Fox Hill, adjacent to the public house The Fox and Hounds. Nowadays Fox Hill is part of Plumstead Common Road.

Having failed the "Scholarship" examination (but not by too much), my secondary education was undertaken at Woolwich Central School in Sandy Hill Road, later to become Woolwich Polytechnic Boys'

School. I believe that most, if not all, London Boroughs had Central Schools, intellectually somewhere between the Elementary and Grammar Schools.

The first two years were the same for all pupils, but at the end of that a choice had to be made between "technical" and "commercial". The latter would lead to the world of economics - banking, money etc., while the former was directed towards science, and engineering and industrial activities. Unluckily, my father had died before I was born, he having worked as a turner in the Royal Arsenal. My mother tried to persuade me to choose commerce and a nice clean job in a bank. I said 'no'. Since I had my first Meccano set, augmented in due course to set number six, one lower than the top set (this last was used in many engineering, drawing and design offices). I had no doubt where my future would lie.

What specific carrots were dangled before the 'commercials' I cannot remember, but the technical side offered three. The most glamorous was "Naval Artificer". Only one boy achieved that during all of my five years at the school. Slightly lower on the glamour scale was "Aircraft Apprentice" in the RAF and, completely unglamorous, "Engineering apprenticeship" at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich. This last was to be won by open national examination and was contested by people from all over Great Britain, the apprenticeship being held in high esteem in



*Jack camping on the Romney Marsh in Kent.*

the engineering world.

Although I had thoughts about marine engineering, I was not academically able enough to try for the Navy. Eventually, I sat examinations for the other two and worked hard towards both.

The result of the Arsenal exam arrived first. I had achieved tenth place in a field of over two hundred! In that year (1932) twelve places were available.

The family situation was somewhat shaky and I felt it right to take the plunge into starting work. My 'reward' was my first bicycle, a Royal Enfield, (built like a gun!) costing three pounds, fifteen shillings, and bought at Blackett's, next to what is now 'The Tram shed', in Woolwich.

It served me well for many years - although the front wheel was such a good fit in the Plumstead Road tramlines that I sometimes had visions of ending up in the Abbey Wood Tram depot. It was my transport for exploring Kent, including an annual camping trip to a farm on the Romney Marsh.

It transpired later that I had also succeeded in the RAF exam but it was too late. I still sometimes reflect on what 'might have been', particularly as the war ensued not long after.

In September 1933 I presented myself at the 'Main Gate' in Beresford Square, in downtown Woolwich, and was conducted to the Central Office, which still stands as Building 22.



*Central Office, Main Administration Block of the Woolwich Arsenal.*

As implied earlier, there were two types of Arsenal apprenticeship.

Firstly the 'Trade Lads' whose training was basically in one field of engineering practice, all trades being available in such a place as a national Arsenal.

Many of these lads, in fact, started as messenger boys, and rode about on bicycles delivering

messages, documents etc. I am not sure how they were selected for apprenticeship.

Secondly, the Engineering Apprentice had spells in several workshops with various activities, usually including one of the drawing offices.

Reading from my indenture my own apprenticeship covered Fitting and Erecting, 15 months; Turning and Machining, 26 months; Moulding, (Brass Foundry) 3 months; Forging, 2 months; Tool design, 6 months; Drawing Office, (Jig & Tool) 6 months.

This was accompanied by schooling for one and a half days at Woolwich Polytechnic, now swallowed up by the Greenwich University complex.

The schoolwork was very exacting. The required yearly examination result in all subjects was 65% and was rather rigidly enforced. Chemistry was a big trial for me and in one year I scored 50%. I had done reasonably well in other subjects, so was warned to obtain the pass mark next time or "else". "Else" meant loss of apprenticeship or "downgrading". I managed to get 64.5% next time and was allowed to carry on. Two of the people in my year forfeited their apprenticeships in this way.

My abiding memory of the Central Office corridor, while awaiting further instructions, is of the typing pool outside of which I stood. As an impressionable sixteen year old, I beheld a roomful of goddesses of surpassing beauty! That fleeting glimpse was soon displaced by the sight of the workshop wherein, I was to start my career, at twelve shillings (60p) per week, less deductions, leaving not a lot to take home.

The shop, at that time known as C.58, was part of the Royal Carriage Department, and was devoted to producing parts for gun carriages of all types.

Perhaps I should explain that complete artillery weapons under the generic term of 'guns' have two principal components. The barrel, more correctly called the 'piece' is, of course, the component from which the missile, be it ball, elongated shot or shell etc. is projected. The carriage is the structure on which the piece is supported. It may be static or mobile. The former are exemplified by coastal defence and ship borne weapons, the latter by field weapons, which are wheeled and towable, formerly by horse, now by special vehicles.



*Boring Mill Woolwich Arsenal.*



*Woolwich Arsenal, Metal Turnery 1905.*

Basically then C.58 was a machine shop and contained various types of lathe; centre, turret, capstan and automatic, all for making cylindrical items. Further, there was a range of machines for producing items of flat shapes - these being shapers, planers and vertical slotters.

The most interesting group however was that comprised of types of gear cutting machines. It would be wearisome to explain the various types of tooth applicable to gearwheels for different applications. Suffice it to say that if tooth shapes are not accurately made on both wheels in a pair, jamming, rattling and lack of correct transmission will result. For this reason I found the measuring of finished teeth as interesting as the actual cutting.

A machine shop such as I have described required a small auxiliary workshop for its own maintenance, and I was placed under Mr Tom Acaster, who was in charge of it. The small range of machines, therein were all familiar to me from the school workshop in Maxey Road behind St James Church. The Central School for girls also had its cookery and housewife centre there.

As a side benefit of experience in the school workshop, I was able to dodge some of the tricks played on new apprentices, such as being sent to have a lead centre punch heat treated, and the coin nailed to the staircase leading to the foreman's office.

Turning (i.e. operating the lathe) and other machining processes as listed formed the bulk of the apprenticeship and in the fourth year we were given a practical test on lathe work. In my own case an inch diameter item was to be 'turned' parallel and to an accurate finished size, and to have a screw thread at one end, again to a specified diameter and 'pitch' (the distance from one thread to the next). A fairly straightforward task, except that the screw thread was a metric size and the machine was English!

My performance secured a prize in the form of a four-inch bench vice, which I still use. My schoolwork also was not too bad and I still have a prize for that - a six-inch adjustable

setsquare.

My final year came under the heading of "Fitting and Erecting". The tolerances in the machining of various parts which, when put together form a mechanism, were quite demanding. Nevertheless, much hand tool work; filing, scraping etc. was needed to produce a smooth working result.

The 'Erecting Shop' was part of the Royal Carriage Dept. and still stands. Among the weapons on which I worked were the famous 3.7 inch Anti-Aircraft gun, Coastal Defence guns of 9.2 inch, 6 inch and 6 pounders (which mounted two guns in one housing). Other calibres were the 2 pounder anti tank gun and a 'mountain gun', which came to pieces for transporting by mule. This last mentioned was some times referred to as the 'screw gun', the barrel breaking down into two parts. Examples of most of these may be seen in the "Firepower" Museum now sited in the Royal Arsenal: they were previously exhibited in the "Rotunda" on Woolwich Common. During the apprenticeship visits were made to places of technical interest. These included Ford Motor-works at Dagenham, Frazer & Chalmers at Erith (Steam Turbines etc.), W. Allens at Bedford (Diesel Engines), Bryant and May, East Ham (Matches & Boxes) and Monotype Printing Works, Redhill.

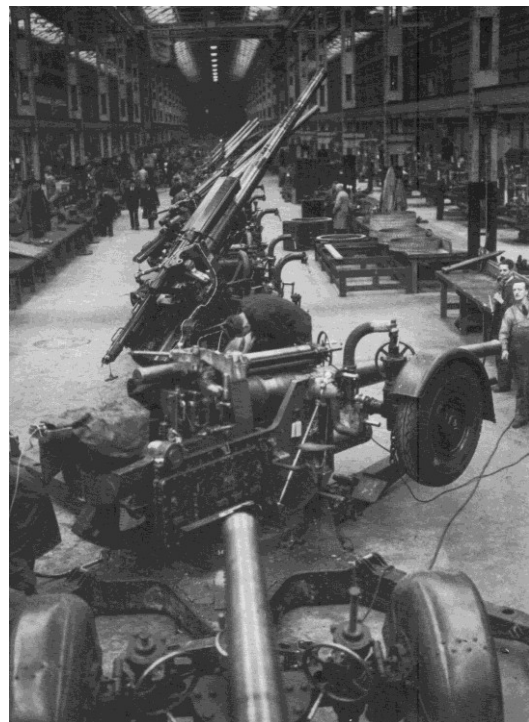
My 'time' ended at this point (I was 21) and I was 'made up' to full standard as a fitter and paid the corresponding full rate. It was 1938 and war clouds were gathering. Life went on, football on Saturday afternoon either playing or watching Charlton Athletic. In the evening queuing at one of the seven Woolwich cinemas, with the girl I was eventually to marry.

Came the war on September 3rd 1939. Everything closed and blackout was imposed. Digging shelters on Plumstead Common, with notices "Dig or Die". Within hours of Chamberlain's Declaration of War came the first air raid warning. Everybody held their breath, especially the elderly with memories of 1914-18. The system of "reserved occupation" applied in the Royal Arsenal but did not initially apply to fitters, except those employed in "tool rooms". I should explain that "tool room fitters" were considered the elite of the fitting trade, perhaps because their work called for accuracy several times that of normal fitting practice.

It happened that a vacancy arose in the RCD Tool room at this time. Three of us were invited to contest it and we were each given a genuine task to attempt. I managed to do best.

By this time, however, I had resolved to bypass "reserved occupation". 'Call up papers' arrived and after a somewhat blistering row with the RCD management I walked out, determined to join up.

Thinking back, I realised that I had been partly influenced by a practice I had noticed in the erecting shop towards the end of my



*Anti Aircraft guns on assembly line, Woolwich Arsenal.*

apprenticeship. From time to time soldiers of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps appeared and were set to work on a task, which I learned, was a test to gain promotion to Armament Staff Sergeant. This would result in the rank badge of three stripes surmounted by a brass crown and 'hammer & tongs' badges. The hammer and tongs were derived from the original arms of the Board of Ordnance, and reach back to the time of Agincourt and further back to the mythology of Vulcan. A fellow apprentice and I had in the past, discussed joining the Corps.

Anyway, I duly reported to the training depot at Chilwell, Nottingham for square bashing and was placed in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

But that, as they say, is another story...

*'With thanks to the, 'Greenwich Industrial History' and Jack Vaughan, for their kind help and permission for this story.*



# *An SE18 Child Of Days Gone By*

*Colin Weightman*

To be born here is but such gain  
amongst the vales and roads so steep  
that is this part of London's hilly terrain,  
where parks and commons and wooded paths meet.



'Born in these hills of London's south east.  
Steep environs where strong limbs are made,  
with views from the top distant vistas to feast,  
grand old river winding 'mongst marshes arrayed.

Climbing the hills daily, to and from school,  
and mums puff bringing home the shopping  
whilst pushing baby wrapped up warm in its shawl,  
stop to meet neighbours they stand happily gossiping.

For us kids there were lots of places to play in,  
with acres of Commons to go see and explore,  
an abundance of places with many parks in between,  
plus the free ferries, the market and much, much more.



Children may well have been scruffy and poor,  
but were rich in freedom and open surroundings.  
Where pleasant fond thoughts of past places explored,  
evoke contented happy memories of former adventurous things.

# *Ancona Road Story*

*Helen Jones*



*This is a picture of my grandmother and granddad (with the X's). It was probably celebrating the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 and is in Ancona Road.*

My grandparents lived in Ancona Road, Plumstead (Orchard Rd). Their house was an old large Victorian house. It covered three floors including a cellar.

During the war the family would use the cellar to shelter from the air raids as you could climb under the house from the cellar and climb back up to the front room.

My house was on the left of the picture, where the tables were just out of shot. The very end of the road came under Welling, in Kent. There was a line that went across the road and the pavement, which divided the two districts. The Plumstead end had a gravel road and the Welling end had tarmac (very odd) wonder if it is still like it? My mother and her sister went to Conway Road School.

My great grand parents had a shop in Plumstead High Street, circa 1900 era. Unfortunately, no one in the family has a photo's of it. It was a sweet shop and their surname was Austin.

# *Anne Clarke Remembers*

*Anne Reen (nee Clarke)*



*Anne Clarke school photo aged 11, in her last year at Conway Primary School.*

First memories were our terraced house in Sladedale Road with its rabbit hutches, chickens, loganberries and runner beans in the back garden. Where, in the winter of '47, (me only two and half years old) the snow was so bad that it piled up so high in the yard that the grown-ups were concerned about access to the outside toilet! The snow was level with the roof of the 'lean to' which housed the toilet.

Toys were mostly made of tin 'hand me downs,' a doll's pushchair, the oven, from a visit to Santa at the Co-op, Powis Street, Woolwich. Plus my train set, a wind up one, which constantly ran off the rails, which broke up if not laid flat on the lino, and my green tip truck.

Granddad's house was the other side of the High Street, in Benares Road. Bigger and better than ours, it had its own bathroom too! Apples and pears grew in his garden and also at his allotment nearby he grew sweet soft fruits and lovely tasting vegetables.

Many years earlier, my mum and her brothers and sister used to walk from this house across fields to Welling and Bexleyheath, not many houses then, and would pick wild strawberries on the way.

My older sisters would take me to the Public Library, in Plumstead High Street. Sometimes we would climb the stairs to visit the museum. I have memories of me giving this museum some pottery I thought might be of value to them!

The Clinic, where warts on my hand were cauterised, was here too, along with the baths and swimming pool, where I learnt to swim, long gone now.



My sisters used the baths, but my bath was located on a nail in the yard! Once a week this was brought down for my weekly bath (rest of the week was 'top 'n' tail' in the butler sink.)

Brookdene Park, not far from granddad's house, had lovely gardens and a skating rink. Oh, how I loved my roller skates. My pal Kathleen and I would go there for most of the day during school holidays. A drink and a sandwich, wrapped in an old tea towel or brown paper, would keep us going.

When at home, we would play hopscotch, shops, skipping or chase. (Generally, this would be tormenting the boys 'till they ran after us. A favourite pastime was trying to find where their camps were, over in the 'oller. \*)

We'd climb trees, roly-poly down the grass slopes, spy on the courting couples and generally run amok on Plumstead Common.

The paddling pool had originally been part of a large lake, (until it was bombed in WWII) in the summer it was a magnet for mums and the kids. Every seat, bench and bank was covered with people and their paraphernalia.

Bird's Nest Gully was a lovely place to go during the long warm summer days.

My sister used to play tennis and nearby the older folks had their game of bowls. There was a little kiosk for drinks and ice cream also.

In the early 1950's there had been a bandstand and people would take a Sunday stroll to watch the band. The Globe cinema, nearby, was small and reputed to house the smallest organ in the South East, possibly even, in the whole of England!

My favourite place though was the swings. (Slade swings) It was here that Alan Stannard, a boy in my class at Conway School, gave me one of his mum's blue curtain rings to wear. I was presented with it on the roundabout, but, by the time I had made it to the swings, his older sister Ann had claimed it back! *See: The Swings At The Slade.*

Sunday was Sunday School. I went with Bert, Tony and Fay (Hooper.) Pam was too little to attend. I still have a Ladybird book presented to me during 1949 for good attendance.

### **School was heaven and hell!**

First day memories were of children crying and clinging to their mother's coat tails. But, I was fearless and excited, and thought them stupid. Hadn't my mum, dad and sisters done a good job with the 'big build up' at home, of how wonderful school was going to be!

We played with toys in the reception class by an open fire, complete with fireguard, that generally had a pair of knickers or pants drying on it! This fascinated me, as toilets were adjacent to this class.

So, I became toilet attendant, asking if anyone needed the toilet and flushing it after they had used it. I'd play with the water in the hand basins afterwards, everything being conveniently at child's height. Mrs Moy, our teacher, put a stop to this pastime! (No wonder school reports were to say later, "Anne could do better if she didn't waste time with those around her!")

Camp beds, in the afternoon, were for us to nap on. If we slept, a few smarties were our reward. Raymond Scarf wasn't sleeping when he pulled the rocking horse tail out, but then neither was I 'cos I saw him!

I thought I was the only Anne in the whole wide world, and there I was confronted by lots of other Ann(e)s! It was Miss Nichols who told me my name was spelt the 'Royal Way'. (Something my sisters never let me forget!)

Mr Bull, the Headmaster, used to drill the boys after assembly. I think it was his army-training coming through. I don't think I ever saw him without a flower in his buttonhole.

Stuart Bowman and I got reported playing 'Knock-down-Ginger' on the way to school. Summoned to Mr Bull's office we were terrified. Placing his hand on his Bakelite telephone, he announced that he was going to phone our father's at work. He was going to inform them of how 'inconsiderate' we had been. (My father and he used to drink in the 'Brewery Tap' on Lakedale Road. Dad in the public bar with his cronies, Paddy & Jock, and Mr Bull in the Saloon.) Needless to say, we crumpled up and cried that we would never do such a thing again! With this promise we were dismissed. (He had explained to us that elderly people might have lived in the houses, taking forever to answer the door, due to their infirmities. This had the effect of making us feel really guilty.)



*Brewery Tap Pub Lakedale Road.  
Photo: Richard Dixey.*

Mr Given and Mr Montgomery had both been in the army also. They never seemed to smile and were strict. I once forgot to knock on a door when entering a room and caught Mr Montgomery in an embrace! This was with Miss., her of the twin-sets, pearls and peaches and cream complexion. Mr Given frightened me no end, by shouting and looking very menacing. Was he afraid I might snitch on him? Possibly.

An incident that happened to me at school resulted in me carrying guilt for a long time afterwards. It all started as a joke that backfired on me. I'd hidden the class dinner money in my desk this was in response to a 'dare'. Most of the class was in on the joke. Teacher had gone to the staff-room and left the coppers in piles on her desk. I was to

'present' the money to her once she noticed it missing. However, she came back into the class in a bad mood, (we had been noisy). Fear gripped me, as I could see the joke wasn't going to work. So I stupidly kept quiet. She asked where the money was, and getting no response, she asked us all to open our desks! Obviously, the money was in my desk, still in its piles. Oh, the shame that followed, as I was hauled in front of the class. She slapped my hands with a ruler (everyone was impressed by this later, as I think I must have been the only girl in the whole school to ever get the dreaded ruler.) I had to repeat that, "My hands are thief's hands!" Also, I had to write on the blackboard lines to this effect as well, (not to be rubbed off either!)

This stayed with me for years and I felt branded! Terrified mum and dad would find out too. More punishment would have been in store for me. They would have agreed with my teacher.

Looking back, I don't think my school pals saw me as a thief. A lesson was learnt by us all on how not to be so stupid! I never took up a dare again, not along those lines anyway! I had learnt that one is always responsible for ones actions. I would have been eight or nine years old at the time this occurred.

Most of school was fun, though I'm not sure I paid attention to the lessons in the way I should have.

Making new friends, feeling sad when they moved away. We once had a boy from Canada, Richard Crossley, in our class. Elaine Turkington and I both loved him and his accent. Back then 'accents' were a novelty, as people didn't travel far, least, not us working classes anyway. There was a boy, older than me, who used to give me shiny conkers. I nicknamed him 'Conker' as I never knew his real name.

Another memory, quite clear, was sitting in the hall at school, waiting for the classroom selections. Petrified, that once the 'A' stream names had been read out that it was all down-hill and perhaps I was going to end up in the 'C' stream. Thank goodness that doesn't happen nowadays. Mr Reeves used to wear check suits and a happier soul you couldn't wish to meet. I loved him to bits (unlike afore mentioned Mr M. & Mr G.) Mr Given saw that the likes of 'Rakey'\*\* a boy in our class, got the cane. Once, after a severe whacking across this boy's hand, Elaine and I were reduced to tears seeing his swollen fingers. Parents would be up in arms if that happened now, and everyone else too.

Mr Harrison was school caretaker and was housed in the cottage situated in the corner of the school playground. An old air raid shelter was there for a while and we were warned to give it a 'wide berth'.

Miss Sims was school helper: she would bathe your already scabby knees whenever you fell down, comfort you when bullied and helped find lost property.

Corner shops were later lost to the supermarkets. I remember Morgan and Grace, in Plumstead High Street, where you could get broken sweets and biscuits for next to nothing. The Co-op has always been in Lakedale Road. I used to attend a Monday Club, after school, in the Co-op hall. It was there that I watched the Coronation on TV, as we didn't own one then, back then in 1953. A tea was laid on for us as well. We also

had a street party, in our lower part of Sladedale Road, for this royal event. Rose White won first prize as Elizabeth the 1<sup>st</sup>; she looked fantastic, as only a three year old could. Lee Sach won second prize as the 'doggy in the window', after a popular song at the time, 'How much is that doggy in the window, woof, woof! (The one with the waggerly tail.)

The trams and trolley buses will also be forever etched in my mind. We didn't travel far them days and Mr Dixey was the first person I knew, in our road, to have a car. I think it was a black Wolseley. His son's, Doug and Geoff, who also went to Conway School, and I went for a ride in the car to Woolwich and back, a very exciting experience for me. *See: Dick (Cyril Dixie) Remembers.*

'Tadpolling' was another past time, at the Ravine pond. I was there with Colin's younger sister Ann and some other children, when Ann's older brother John came along and threatened to pour the jar of tadpoles we'd caught over our heads! His mum chased him with the broom handle when she found out about it!

I can remember most of the names of my classmates from both schools. Pam Musto, her dad owned the 'Radalec' radio and TV repair shop near Plumstead Bridge. Janice Ludlow of the Fish Shop, Plumstead High St.

I remember Mr Lewis's toy shop in Lakedale Rd. He had a goose that laid a golden egg in the window. I thought it a superb toy (this was in late 40's, maybe to 50/51.) The Plumstead Fire Station and the engines, boots, poles, uniforms, all gleaming. The newspaper stand was also situated there, on the corner of Lakedale Road and the Plumstead High Street of an evening, busily selling the 'Star News and Standard' evening papers to the workers returning home from their work. This was where granddad would meet us and sometimes he'd give me a thru'penny bit or a silver sixpenny piece. I'd buy ice cream, flying saucers, sherbet dabs, toffee apples and sometimes - sticky buns or colouring books. I recall the pet shop in Plumstead High St and the parrot they had there; it pecked a hole in my finger!

I remember the thick grey fogs, open fires; making toast on them with the toasting



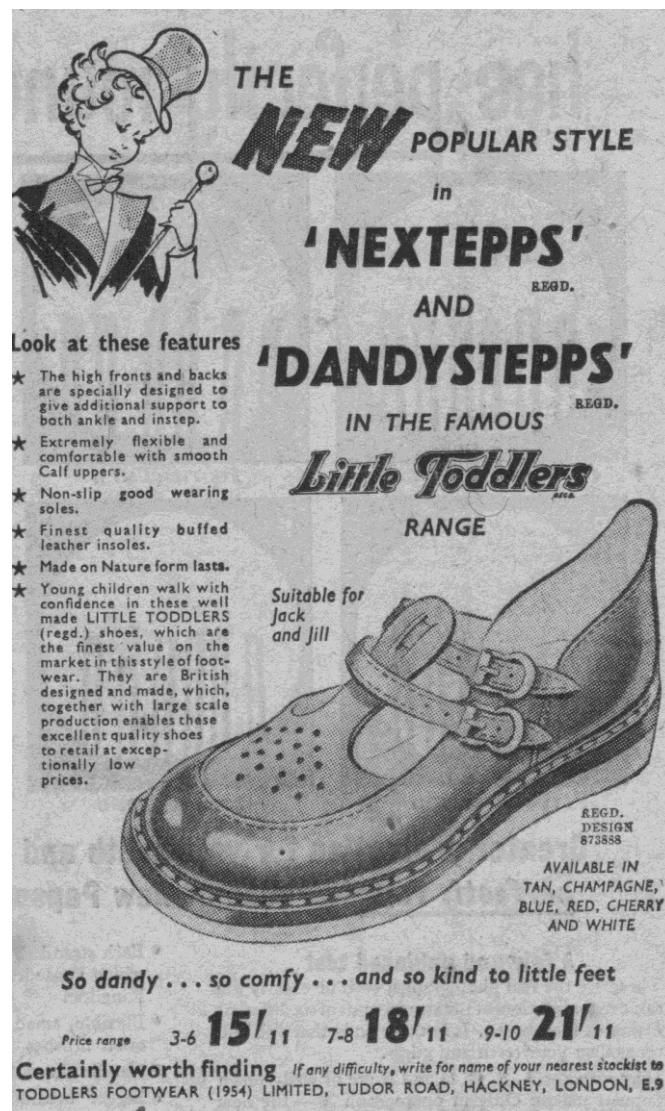
*Fire Station, Corner of Lakedale Road Plumstead c.1910.  
Photo: Greenwich Heritage Centre.*

fork; and 'Uncle Mac' on the wireless.

All these are fond memories of childhood days. A bit confusing at times. 'Grown ups' in the main had such high standards and I think most of us were afraid of them. They in turn were 'thrown' when the 60's came. Not many of them around now to see the advancement of 'progress and changes', which is just as well I guess.)

\*See story: 'Going Down The 'ollow'.

\*\*See story: 'Brian Rake (Rakey) Remembers'.



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# *Ann's Story*

## *Reminiscences of Ann Warner (nee Weightman)*

Fond memories of early childhood days, of Plumstead Common and the nearby woods around the mid 1950's era.

### *Summer*

All of a sudden they were there; blackberries!

Jam jars were acquired from mum, who seemed to have jars on hand; no recycling then.

Off we would go, usually three or four of us kids from Sladedale Road and pick the juiciest and tastiest blackberries ever, excited at getting something to take home and everyone declaring they had picked the biggest one yet!

Scratched and stained hands; we'd take our haul home and mum would make apple & blackberry pudding or stewed apple & blackberry with custard.....Yum!

### *Autumn*

I remember my brother Colin showing us kids fossils in the stones on the Common. It was just too good to be true; I thought it was a trick.

Breaking open the stones by bashing them together and to actually see the sparkling crystal inside the stone, or the imprint of a shell, was the best natural history lesson I'd ever had.

After we realised the Common held treasures like these, we would go hunting for hours on the stone slide, situated on the first bit of the Common on the left going up Lakedale Road.

When we had explored the stones enough we'd run at full pelt down the steep stony hill causing a mini avalanche that would spill over onto the pavement; great fun.

I went back there years later, after our family moved to Manor Park in East London. The grass had grown over all the stones, hiding them, along with their hidden treasures.

### *Winter*

Wintertime was great when the snow lay thick on the steep slopes of the Common above the Ravine Lake, and if you had older brothers, as I did, they would have made a wooden sledge.

The neighbourhood kids would congregate on the Common and everyone took turns; no pushing or shoving, just good fun. Sliding down at breakneck speed with many bumps and



*Ann aged about three on the annual Sunday School seaside*

occasional wipe out spills into the thick soft snow.

By this time your woollen gloves, two pairs of socks and wellies were well and truly soaked. The intense cold would grip you and, shivering, you would make your way home.

Mum would somehow get everything warm and dry and you'd be ready to go out again for more thrills, on those busy snow covered slopes of the Common.

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# *At Plumstead*

*Roger Taylor*

*Snake Camden Poetry Group Anthology in 1994.*

These roads almost insist  
That you climb from near-river  
Homes - doors on the street,  
By thoroughfares that twist  
Hillward, without ever  
Looking back at low-estate.

Victorian times you see repeat -  
Position and a view -  
Iron railings and a gate,  
High hat and frock coat  
Or a bustle stepping through.

A century has replaced  
Customs, those lives remote;  
Despite which, one infers  
The servant and the served -  
The menial and the graced -  
Gunners and officers.

*Roger Taylor, a member of the Camden Poetry Group, wrote this poem in 1992. It was published in the Silver Snake Camden Poetry Group Anthology in 1994.*



# *Babette Meader (nee Saunders) Remembers*

*Babette Meader*

My father [long dead] grew up in Saunders Road in Plumstead. I have been trying to find out if there was any connection as his (and my) surname was Saunders. They were a family of tearaways from what I can make of it. I have no data at all of any of his family; a large lump of my life has always been missing. Also my mum worked in Woolwich Arsenal during the war. She once scaled the gates that had been locked due to a very heavy air raid. She ran all the way home to my brother (whom she adored) when we lived in the 1914 prefabs, built at the top of Knee Hill, from where I was evacuated.

My dad worked in the Abbey Wood tram depot, which I now believe is a housing estate. When a driver, he used to tell me tales of bicycle tires getting caught in the tramlines and the rider finishing up in the depot unable to get his bike out. If goods were found on the tram they were supposed to be handed in. My mother often sported a fancy hat that he brought home for her. He drove to the Plumstead, Woolwich and Eltham areas. He told me once, after he transferred to trolley buses, that he was driving down Powis Street, in Woolwich, and the circus was in town and they were advertising it by parading elephants down Powis Street. One of the elephants poed and dad was right behind it in his trolley bus. Dad told us kids that he couldn't drive around it as it was so big! So they had to get a council lorry out to clear it away. My Father with his huge sense of humour came home saying, "One elephant poo, one lorry load!"



I had an aunt who lived behind the tram depot. She was a sister of my mother; their maiden name was Pettitt, I think. They all grew up in Plumstead. There were eight girls and one son, all now of course dead. My mother's mother (my gran) was a great one for running off with

half a dozen different men and then coming back. My aunt, who lived behind the tram depot, only had gas mantles for lighting. My mum and dad were married when they were quite young (it was something of a battlefield). Dad was in the RAF during the war, going to the D-day landings as an RAF Convoy Leader. During that time my mother worked in the



*Checking an Anderson shelter surrounded by wreckage of bombed house.*

Arsenal making munitions. A few days after I was evacuated we had a direct hit on the wooden prefab house, situated at the top of Knee Hill. They were sent to a holding area and finished up in Welling, living over the top of Sidney Ross the toy shop, opposite to what used to be the Embassy Dance Hall in Welling High Street. My dad had by then transferred to trolleybuses. After coming off duty he was running for a bus to go back to Woolwich Market to get something and was run over and died that day at what used to be The Brooke Hospital. My mum, soon after this, remarried to a man who owned the fish shop next to the Co-op in Welling High Street. I now look after him down here in Devon. Before the war, in behind our house, at the top of Knee Hill, was what used to be called the "Fair Field." Fairs used to come there, with chair-a-planes and dodgems etc. but it was taken over and used by the ack ack gun units during the war.

I recall on my way to school seeing a German plane circling around Woolwich Arsenal, obviously on reconnaissance. My dad had taught me that whenever I saw a German plane I was to lie on the ground, next to a tree or a wall, but instead I ran like billy-o to school.

We had a direct hit on our house during an air raid and my mum and brother were trapped in the air raid shelter for nine hours before they were dug out. My brother lost the hearing in one ear and mum had a piece of shrapnel embedded in her chin and went to hospital to have it removed.

I have a feeling my mother worked at the Goldie Leigh Hospital Homes cleaning, after she and my dad fell out. Opposite Goldie Leigh Hospital was a small hill at the bottom of Lodge Hill and the kids used to toboggan down it in the snow. I can also recall some one who hung himself in Bostall Woods from a tree. I believe my husband's father was a policeman in Woolwich Arsenal. He told me of once visiting a farm near Bostall Woods and watching them milking the cows and they aimed the milk straight at him and messed his shirt up as it turned a green colour!

Quite often we went shopping in Plumstead. I lived there for a while and can very well remember the A J S motorbikes being test driven around the streets. I was into motorbikes in a big way myself, so seeing them was always a thrill. I worked in Plumstead, at a TV and radio repair shop, at Radalec's corner shop near the Arsenal gates, Plumstead Station Bridge.

# Baggage

*Albert Richard Hooper*

I was born and raised in Plumstead. The community acquired such a name because early settlers grew plums and other orchard fruits in the area and had also named its small stream the River Plum. Plumstead covers the complete north side of Shooters Hill, from 'The Bull Inn' on its summit, which is described so well in the opening chapter of 'A Tale of Two Cities', down to the River Thames, which at one time had become nothing more than an open sewer. Millions of well spent pounds and the threat of very severe fines for polluting this grand old lady have transformed her back into a clean and safe recreational river, which you can once again go fishing in, and with any luck even catch one.

Plumstead, with its many open areas of land set aside for common use, was an ideal place to live, especially in the early and middle parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It was in this semi rural location that my parents purchased their first and only home in the 1930s.

One of the largest landmarks on Plumstead Common was St Mark's Church, with its large double bell towers. One tower had a large flagpole on it and the other was crowned by a huge black and gold weather vane. The towers, and the massive stone cross on the ridge of the church roof, were taller than even the biggest of trees in the area and served to show me the way home, when, as a young boy in the early 1950s, I started to explore the world around me. I well remember my father showing me the very thick lightning conductor



*St Mark's Church, above the trees on Plumstead Common c1950's.*

*Photo: Ron Bramble.*

that ran down the side of one of the towers, which attested to their height.

I don't know exactly at what age my parents started sending me to Sunday School, but I do remember that I was young enough for my brother to have to walk me there and back. He'd then dash off to join the surplus of young women who were vying for the attention of the few young men who belonged to the youth group. Parental approval of a boyfriend was required in those days, you see, and believe me, he took advantage of the situation and did the rounds, so to speak. After all, you never got into trouble if you brought a girl home late from a church function; it was God's work!

As I grew older one of the Sunday School teachers suggested that I should join the church choir. My parents agreed, and before long I was a full-fledged member of the, butter-wouldn't-melt-in-his-little-mouth, pew rat society. Within a year I had risen in rank to the exulted position of 'Head Choirboy, chancel east side' and I became very proud and thankful of the title.

As 'Head Choirboy, chancel east side,' it was my solemn sworn duty to lead the whole choir in and stay parallel with the 'Head choirboy, chancel west side' at all times. This, I might add, was easier said than done, as he would quite often speed up or slow down in an effort to put me off. He was senior to me in the choir, but it had taken him three years to reach his position; my one-year rise to fame was more than he could bear.

One day I met him on the Common and started to try and get a conversation going. A rain shower suddenly changed the day from a lazy school holiday to something that resembled a North Sea gale. We ran to the shelter of St Mark's Church and sat inside the huge oak doors next to the Armed Forces, Scout and Guides flags that adorned the entrance.

"Do yer know what's in that there box?" he asked, pointing to a small wooden box on a table just inside the door.

"Keys," I replied, just guessing as to its contents.

"No mate," he said. "There's money in that there box," he whispered.

"What's it for?" I asked.

"If people forgets to put their money in the plate on Sundays, or if they don't show up and fink God will be mad 'cos they missed a payment, they puts it in there in the week," he replied.

"What if robbers come and take some?" I asked.

"Who's to know," he replied, "Where do you fink I gets me money for fags and fings," he added.

Over the next few weeks we dipped our hands into the box many times and took a total of almost five shillings, which we hurriedly spent on sweets and caps for our toy guns. I even took another friend there to show him an easy way of obtaining pocket money.

As time went on I realized that what I had done was very wrong, but I knew of no way in which to repent of my sins. I chose instead to bury my crimes against God and His Church in the back of my mind and forget the whole thing. Strangely enough, it was about that time that I started pulling away from the Church and going my own way.

Many years later and with a failed marriage behind me I started to reflect on the possible reasons for the problems in my life. One of the things that kept coming back to haunt me was the money that I had stolen from St Mark's Church, twenty-five years earlier. Was it possible that my problems were some form of punishment from heaven? Was I now a marked man, as the 'Head choirboy, chancel west side' had suggested in his many successful attempts to control all my actions in and around the choir back then? My self-esteem was sub zero, everything was a mess.

In an attempt to set things right I saved my money and made plans to leave Vancouver and

make a visit to England from whence I had emigrated in the late 1960s. I desperately needed to put the money, with interest, back in the box, throw myself before our Lord and beg for his forgiveness.

I arrived in England on a typical foggy December day and headed for the warmth and comfort of my parents' home. Everyone at home knew that I was on some sort of journey of self-rediscovery; my wounds were many, but nobody tried to pry. Though I was extremely tired, we all went to the pub that night, which enabled me to re-establish some old friendships. I went to bed that night happy in the knowledge that I was only hours away from the purpose of my pilgrimage.

After breakfast, I excused myself for a few hours by saying that I was going for a walk around the neighbourhood to check out all the changes that had taken place in the years since I had left. I walked up the hill in eager expectation of exiting the fog at some point, but London weather being what it is, it only got worse.

I started to cross Plumstead Common, by way of the steps at the top of Lakedale Road, and passed by the small twin ponds that I'd tried to catch fish in as a Common kid. It had been nothing more than a couple of drainage catchment basins, and always would be; at least so I had thought. On a subsequent visit back home just before the passing of my mother, I noticed, with an extremely happy heart, that they were not like that any more, and showed signs that they had started to be managed and cleaned on what appeared to be a regular basis. I later discovered that the dramatic changes to the Slade Ponds were the handiwork of the dedicated members of the Plumstead Common Environment Group, who continue to do this work not only there, but also throughout the entire Common region.

When I arrived at St Mark's, I pushed open the large wrought iron gates and started to walk down the long path towards the big oak doors and the inner peace I knew I was about to obtain. As I got closer to the church steps however, the developing picture, coming into focus through the fog, struck like a sharp knife deep into my heart.

St Mark's, as I had known it, was gone! In its place, a very small chapel now stood. It was not much different in size than the original St John the Divine Anglican Church in Maple Ridge, British Columbia, where I now make my home.

I stood there and cried as I suddenly realized that my theft could have probably been the beginning of the end for good old St Mark's; God had indeed punished me for eternity.

"Can I help you?" asked a man who was walking down the path towards the church.

"It's too late," I replied, with tears still streaming down my face.

"It's never too late for Jesus, my friend," he said, as he placed a hand on my arm.

"It is this time," I replied.

"Don't talk rubbish!" he said, as he opened the door. "I'll go and put the tea on, then we'll have a little chat," he added.

I told him my story, and he listened without interruption until I had finished. He poured another cup of tea for us both and leaned back in the chair and looked at me straight in the eyes.

"Do you have any children?" he asked.

"Yes, I have two daughters," I replied.

"Have you ever caught either of them stealing something," he asked.

"I caught one of them once," I replied. "I guess she takes after her father," I added.

"Did you forgive her, or do you punish her every day?" he asked.

"I forgave her, of course!" I replied, somewhat shocked at such a question.

"Don't you think your Father in Heaven is just as forgiving as you are?" he said, with a nod and a smile.

"I never thought of it that way," I replied.

"That's because you haven't forgiven yourself for your light-fingered exploits," he said, as he slapped me on the back.

"But what about the old church?" I pleaded, "Why did God let it be pulled down," I cried.

"That's easy," said the old man, as he threw his hands into the air and started to explain what had happened.

Apparently, when St Mark's was built, back in Victorian times, it was constructed on a shoestring budget, with more emphasis on its appearance than its structural integrity. In simple terms, it had been falling apart at the seams and would have cost considerably more to fix than rebuild. Also, the heating costs alone were incredibly high with such a large building.

"So the old place was doomed anyway," I said with a smile.

"Doomed even before I was born," he replied, "You just probably did us a favour by spending the money on something else other than that old pile of bricks and mortar," he added.

"You're just saying that to make me feel better," I said, as I looked at his deep brown eyes.

"Look son, I was always expecting one of them beams or something to come crashing down in the middle of a service," he said with a serious look on his face.

"Thank you, Father," I said, as I got up to leave.

"Oh, I'm not a vicar," replied the old man with a laugh. "I just opens the doors and keeps an eye on fings," he added.

I saw him again in church the following Sunday, when I secretly returned the money with interest. I also saw him again one night in the pub, just before I returned to Canada.

"How you feeling' now son?" he asked.

"Fine, thanks to our little talk," I replied.

"Good," he nodded. "No-one needs that kind of baggage weighing them down," he added.

"It sure feels like a load is lifted off of my back," I replied.



"Now you can get on with your life," he said, as he turned to head back to the people he was with. "But don't forget to do some of His work too," he added, as he raised his glass and gave me a wink.

I returned to Canada, got on with my life and made a promise to God to take things, especially myself, a little less seriously from that day forward.

Now I know that there is a remote possibility that a few of you who have just read this will jump with joy and say that you knew there was something odd or shady about this writer all along. You may even look down your nose and think that you are a better person for never having had similar thoughts, let alone given in to such temptation. That's the risk you always face when you tell it like it is and lay your heart and mind bare for all to see. I smile upon such criticism from the perfect, who actually believe it is their God-given right to be judge and jury of all our actions.

I believe, however, that most of you will probably identify with my story and see a little part of yourself and the way that our baggage, brought on by a silly childhood action, can become so blown out of proportion as we allow it to fester inside of us for years.

Every Lent I take the time to sit and reflect on other bits of baggage that I have been carrying around with me. You would be amazed at the number that I have had to deal with over the years. For instance, would you believe that just a few years ago, I wouldn't sing or speak in public because of a fear of making a mistake! .

An incident of child abuse at the hands of a stranger followed by such episodes as the above experience with the Head choirboy, chancel west side, amongst others, only served to bury me under their weight.

It wasn't learning Scripture by chapter and verse that pulled me out, nor was it from listening to people quote their latest scriptural discovery, which I might add only builds wonderful safe little walls around themselves. They are the ones that call themselves religious; God bless them.

You may have noticed that I haven't quoted Scripture anywhere in this story; I chose instead to be down to earth and ordinary, just like the old man I met at St Mark's Church; just like my best friend, who was eventually joined to me in marriage; just like a friend who used to drop in for a chat in the early days of my divorce; just like the couple who asked me to be the M.C. at their wedding; and just like the chap I play my guitar with, who masks my bad notes with his keyboard whenever possible.

It was the simple, unconditional love of ordinary people like these that pulled me out and pointed me in what I believe has been the right direction.

That's my wish for you all: throw away your baggage and really live. God doesn't want you to suffer under the weight of past guilt and he really doesn't give a damn what it is, so let it go. You may even find, as I did, that it was all in my head!

# *Baked Spuds And Tea Leaves*

*Colin Weightman*

Us Common kids would smuggle some King Edward spuds from home and some matches, with a bit of the striker off the matchbox. Hide them in our jumpers and sneak over to the furthest recesses of the Common, down into the holly bushes by the St Nick's Hospital wall.



*Colin aged about eight.*

We'd gather some dry dead twigs and dry grass, and build a campfire in the clearings we made inside these big bushes. We'd skewer the spud on a pointed green stick and hold it over the flames. We loved to sit around the crackling fire whilst holding and slowly turning our smoke blackened scorched raw spuds. It really brought out some instinctive primal satisfaction, which was, after all, just under our mischievous skins anyway!

We were very careful in keeping the fire well supplied with dry twigs and dry grass, as this would keep the smoke down to a minimum. The reason for this was that too much smoke attracted the dreaded Park Keeper. If this brown uniformed fella did turn up we would scarper, running in all directions to avoid getting caught. This uniformed fella with his brown serge jacket and trousers and his brown trilby hat complete with brass badge would, often enough, turn up during our spud baking sessions, or during our secret experimental smoking pow-wows!

During these very serious and secret smoking sessions we would smoke the hollow stems of dry grass, or some smuggled tea leaves from home, wrapped in toilet paper or newspaper. We'd even smoke the tobacco from discarded cigarette butts that we'd find in the gutters. I learnt this last mentioned method of illicit smoking from the tramps. As they filed along the streets on their late afternoon journey to the doss house they would pick up discarded cigarette butts.

The doss house was situated along Plumstead High Street towards the hospital. Sometimes, on our way home from primary school, we would help a friendly smelly old tramp pick up these cigarette butts from along the gutter: 'Dog ends' we called them. We would sit with him on the seat, situated on Brewery Road and Orissa Road corner, and watch him as he broke all these butts up into his tobacco tin then re-roll them into fags and smoke them. So, with this very valuable lesson learnt we put it into good use, as Common kids tend to do, without too much trouble!

Even if the keepers didn't interrupt us we never actually ever managed to cook our spuds. We would bite into our smoke blackened and charred, still raw, spud and declare

to each other, very convincingly, mmmm!... lovely!.... but secretly spitting it out as soon as possible.

Although our spuds were only ever cooked to a depth of around a millionth of an inch and our smoking exploits made us cough and choke and our eyes turned red and streamed with tears we all agreed how good it was. I don't ever recollect getting caught by the Keepers. But we could sure run pretty nippy those days though.

On the other hand, I certainly did get caught once though! A stunt that we used to play was to set light to the gorse bushes. These bushes grew in clumps and were dotted along the Lakedale Road side of the Commons hills. We'd light the fire and then race down to the fire station on the corner of Lakedale Road and Plumstead High Street, push the big fire alarm button on the wall outside and tell the firemen where the fire was. If you were lucky you might even get a lift up in the fire engine to the fire.

Trouble was another kid split on Ken and me. A copper came to our house and told both our mums what we had been up to. We got a bleeding good hiding of course. We were then marched down to Plumstead Police Station to a very stern lecture and more clips round the ears before being marched all the way back home, whilst being reminded every step of the way of how we were going to cop it when we got back home. And then another hiding from dad!

Cor blimey, I ask ya, where on erf is the justice in it all?

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# *Barbara Sullivan (nee Chappell) Remembers*

*Barbara Sullivan*

I was born in Kentmere Road Plumstead in 1940. I was one of nine, - seven girls and two boys. I went to Conway Road School when I was five. We would have a sleep in the afternoon on little canvas beds, in the playground in the summer, and the hall in the winter. As well as a bottle of milk we had a spoonful of cod-liver oil and malt. When I was in the big class Mr Hedges was my teacher. There was a teacher who used to boot the boys in the backside, but I cannot remember his name. Mum used to work in the Arsenal during the war; it would be nice if anyone remembers her; her name is Grace Chappell. My sister, Veronica, was evacuated during all of the war. When she came home she had a lovely green velvet suit on and her blonde hair was in ringlets. She would not go to bed without her 'rags' in her hair. Mum went round all the neighbours until she found someone who knew how to put the rags in.

We had so much fun on the Woolwich Ferry in the school holidays, going back and forth many times until you got chucked off. It was all outside then, and you could sit on deck and sun yourself or you could go down to the engine room that was all highly polished brass. The engineers were very proud of it! However, sadly due to 'Health & Safety' they have all been closed in now, so all you can do is sit and look at each other, even though I never heard of anyone ever falling accidentally overboard.

The ferry would take us to Victoria Gardens, North Woolwich, and it was like going abroad when the sun shone. It had lots more to do than our local park and was about three times bigger, with a large paddling pool and sand pit. Then we would go home, going through the foot tunnel running and shouting to hear the echo, but then we would have a mile to walk home, so this event only happened on special occasions.



We had some good neighbours in Plumstead. They all kept an eye on each other's children and helped out when necessary. We would have to run errands for them. There was no 'I'm doing something' or 'later on': when they wanted an errand they got an errand straight away.

We had two big families at the bottom of the road, the Bethals and the Turners. They lived in the road running along the bottom of Kentmere Road, in Hartville Road.

Mrs Bethal was pregnant the same time as mum was many times, so we would pair up to play. Veronica and Glynis mostly, who remained friends until sadly Glynis's death in recent years. They had aunts and grans in the road as well as us, so we were always looked out for.

Aunt Lily and uncle Sid, who were very stern, (I did not like them) and our cousins Iris, Bill

and Pat lived next door. Iris was always in our house as she was a good friend of mum's. She was tall and would often break the gas mantle when she forgot to duck! We hated it when she brought her scissors in, as we knew it was time for haircuts, known as the basin cut, especially if 'Nitty Nora' had been at the school and had given one of us a 'nit' card. Off would come the hair (a shorter cut) and out came the dreaded steel nit comb; with your head over the newspaper, that steel comb was dragged through your head, and it hurt!

My dear old nan. (She had 14 children; the youngest at the age of 52, no IVF was needed for her). She was a big cuddly lady with a big heart. The older generation had such a hard time going through two wars and a depression!

She lived in a little three up, three down, terraced house in Plumstead, at 19 Kentmere Road. In the little kitchen was a stone copper in the corner that you lit a fire under for all the hot water and the boiling of clothes on washdays, making the whole house fill with steam. Her fridge was a wooden box with a chicken wire door, covered by a wet tea towel to convect the air cooler, held in place by two flat irons. There was also a large table, two forms and a rocking chair. The front room, which was known as the parlour, was only used on special occasions. Eventually it became my brother Ron's bedroom when he was home on leave in later years, but meanwhile it housed the aspidistra plant!

Granddad was still alive for the first nine years of my life! The latter part of his life was confined to a wheelchair. We spent a great deal of time sitting by the fire looking at how many things we could make in the flames and shadows on the wall. I would sit with him and make spills to light his pipe. He was a very tall and thin man, with a bushy moustache and stiff white collar. When he went out he wore a black hat. I remember he used to give me a saucer of his tea; I wish I had known him better!

Mum and the children moved in when the war started in September 1939 as dad worked away. It was only supposed to be a temporary arrangement but we stayed 19 years, until she moved out. (Later, when I was married, I took mum's rooms over, and bought the house and lived with nan till she died; then I had all of the house).

Nan had a parlour, one bedroom and a large kitchen downstairs, whilst mum and family had two bedrooms and a kitchen/living-room upstairs, there was an outside 'loo' for everyone in the house and a large tin bath. I was born the next July (1940) and Ron and Veronica were evacuated. Veronica was fortunate where she was placed because she was with people who cared for her, so much



*My granddad with all his children, taken in Tewson Road about 1928. He was my dad's dad. Photo: Barbara Sullivan.*

so, that they kept her for a year after the war and really wanted to keep her permanently. But of course mum and dad wouldn't hear of it. Ron wasn't so lucky. Having been sent to Wales, he was ill treated, and after six months mum went and fetched him home! As the schools were shut, only opening for one day a week, Ron was quite happy to play on the bombsites, collecting shrapnel, and watch the planes which were frequently flying overhead at that time.

We were scared to go to the 'loo', which was outside, in the night time. Mum would not allow us to have candles, so we had to get used to feeling our way about the house, but to go out into the garden was another thing! The outside loo had a foot sized gap at the top and bottom of the door. You didn't stay in there long in the winter, with the snow and the wind and rain coming in. In the summer it wasn't too good either, as you had the geese from next door pecking at your ankles!

Living near the Royal Arsenal was handy for mum as she worked in the Munitions factory there, which was an important part of the war effort. The downside was that it was a constant target for the German bombing raids that blighted London. We were very lucky to have survived these attacks, especially mum.



We never had a holiday, but enjoyed long hot summers at the park, which had a large paddling pool, football pitch and an area of lawn. We would take a bag of jam sandwiches, a bottle of sherbet water and stay all day. We rarely went out of our area as we didn't really think about doing so, but on Bank holidays, we would go over the ferry to Victoria Park. There would be music from the bandstand; this was always a special day. In the evenings, we would play in the street with marbles, jacks, halfpenny and up the wall, fag (cigarette) cards etc. Some of the other children had trek bikes, but they had no brakes. Fortunately there were no hills to speak of in the area, so it wasn't too hard to cycle around as I would be sitting on the cross bar.

We made a go-cart from a wooden soapbox, fitted with a set of pram wheels, a plank of wood attached to a crosspiece and a piece of string as reins to steer.

Although we did not have holidays, the highlight of the year was the 'Maybloom Outing', which was the local social club. There was also the Conservative Club and nearly every family in the area belonged to one or the other. Once a year they had an outing to the seaside. The Maybloom went to Margate by coach and the Conservatives went to Southend by train.

It was in July that we got a new pair of plimsolls and were all smartened up and ready to go on our trip. We would meet at the club at 8am. There would be about 30 coaches to take us. Not many of the mums and dads could go, so we were trusted to behave ourselves, which we did, because if we didn't, there were plenty of adults to report on us and we didn't get to go next year, as mum wouldn't have forgotten if we had misbehaved.

The highlight of the day was when we were issued with our lunch boxes and a half-crown; wow!! When we got to Margate, we went to 'Dreamland' first, a big fun fair. You paid so

much, and could then go on as many rides and as many times that you wanted. We went on everything until we were exhausted. We then went to the beach, ate our lunch, then tucked our dresses into our knickers, went paddling and of course, we got soaking wet. On the way back to the coach we would buy mum a little present then spend the last of our money in the penny slot machines. All too soon, it was time to go home, but even on the way home in the coach we would have a sing song and games before arriving back at the club about 8pm where we would have lemonade and all decide that it was the best outing ever, until next year! Then a short walk home and into bed, no messing about, head down and sleep!!

Christmas was really something! Dad usually painted the kitchen on Christmas Eve after being nagged by mum for months beforehand. But he always left it to the last moment. Dad was a builder but mum always had trouble getting him to do anything about the house, so on Christmas Eve the place was in an uproar. However, on Christmas day when we woke up, it was all done, walls were distempered and coloured rings made on the walls with the dabbing of a sponge!

Christmas Eve was a busy one for us all, mum doing last minute shopping and us kids plucking the chicken, chasing the little ones with the feet of the chicken and pulling the ligaments of the feet to open and shut the claws, licking and sticking the paper chains and making lanterns ready to hang up on Christmas morning. We also decorated nan's room. Everyone was happy; we could hardly sleep when we went to bed. It was so exciting, we would chat and make wishes and try to guess what we would get. But when I look back, things never changed much over those years; we hung up one of mum's laddered stockings she had been saving, and to get an apple, orange, a handful of nuts and half a dozen Roses chocolates, was very exciting to us all. Most of the stocking leg was taken up with a rolled up painting book, a little tin of paints and one of us would get the game snakes and ladders or ludo. We were frightened to put our stockings down in case one of the others said it was theirs, so we looked like the seven dwarfs walking around with our stockings over our shoulders all day!

After dinner, we all stood up for the King's speech on the radio. Then we would play charades; all the relatives that had popped in and out during the day were now gone, our stockings were now empty and eventually we would go to bed exhausted but looking forward to Boxing Day.

Another big day was 'Co-op' day! The High Street would be buzzing. All the tin and brass cheques were counted before in readiness for the day. The thin tin cheques were the equivalent to a pound, the brass ones were over that amount; you got them when you spent so much money in the Co-op and saved them and then on 'the day' you were able to exchange them for cash; we kids loved counting them. We then went with nan to the Co-op hall near the corner of Lakedale and Conway Roads and queued for what seemed like forever, but it was fun; everyone was saying, "I wonder how much the dividend would be this year" No-one minded waiting, all were chatting and laughing, knowing we would get something at the end of it.

Another 'good' day was when the meter was emptied. The gasman would arrive and empty the meter, count the money out, and we all watched him, but he was so fast we could hardly see his fingers move. He would stack the pennies high in a row, putting the round pieces of

lino that were used when we did not have a penny for the gas to one side, then, he would put his quota of the money into his bag, leaving nan with the residue.

Every Friday mum would visit the Plumstead Public Baths to do the washing! There were boilers alongside two sinks, a partition, shoulder high in between in a long row. All the women would stand in a line chatting while they scrubbed away on their wash boards, using a large bar of 'Sunlight' soap. The big dryers were from floor to ceiling; to use them you had to pull them out of the wall; fortunately, they were on wheels that made it easier to pull, as they were about twenty feet long. They had many dryers with rows of bars which you hung your washing on, then you pushed the dryer back into the wall to dry the clothes. The best bit was the ironing room. After all the washing and drying, it was more relaxing, and we only had flat irons at home, whereas at the baths they had electric ones. Mum would be at the baths for about five hours, having first put the wash into the tin bath, and two of us had to take turns to take it and fetch it from the baths; we hated this in case any of our friends saw us.

Sunday night was bath night! Two of us got the bath from the garden and carried it upstairs; pots of hot water from the stove were poured in, then the youngest got in, one at each end. By the time it was the eldest one's turn, you can imagine that the water was not nice to get into: cold, dirty water. The side of the bath that was nearest to the fire was hot and the side away from the fire was cold: there was no happy medium. When all was done, the bath had to be carried back down the stairs to be emptied; the unlucky pair who had to do this task usually got soaked. To this day, I don't know why the bath wasn't emptied upstairs: it would have saved many a soaking.

As we got older, we would go to the Plumstead Public Baths with a rolled up towel and a bar of Sunlight soap under our arm (there were no nice bubble baths or shampoo in those days). The baths were partitioned off all in a row. The walls were about seven foot high, which was handy to throw the soap over to the next person. The attendant operated the flow of the water from outside the room with a mobile handle. She would stand at the door while the water ran into the bath to a level of about 14 inches, then she would say to us, "Try it", meaning, 'How hot is it', so you tried it with your hand, but it's your bum that you should have tried it with because when you got in and found that it was too hot and rang the bell for some cold water to be put in, she got very angry! "Are you messing me about, do not ring again or you're out," was her reply.

Overall, Kentmere was a nice homely road to live in and very handy for the hospital and Fire Station at the top of the High Street. The phone box, and the undertaker's shop was on the corner of our road; next door to them was a shop where we would take a pudding basin for faggots and pease pudding with lovely gravy. Next to them was, the hairdressers, who mum went to for sixty years. Next to the hairdressers, was the dress shop! This, along with two other shops, was owned by Jean and Brian; they became friends when, later, Sue and Brenda worked for them on Saturdays whilst still at school, then full time when they had left school.

Some of the shops in the High Street were family run businesses. Bradshaw's, Heads and two others for fruit and vegetables, Morgan's had three shops for dairy etc.; Williams for broken biscuits, David Greg's for cold meats. We had two fish and chip shops plus the Co-op where you could buy a ¼ of butter or two Oxo's, five Woodbines and two rashers of bacon or one

egg, because with no fridge or freezers to keep things fresh, you only bought as and when you needed it.

We did not throw anything away, such as potato peelings: they went into a 'pig bin' that had to be chained to a lamppost half way down the street because the horses or kids would knock it over. The dustbin was mostly used for ashes, which the dustmen would collect on a Monday, having had to walk through the house to collect it. They would have to wear several sacks on their backs, as sometimes the ashes were still hot in the bins.

Mum was not a homely person, but she was good fun! Just a plain cook of lovely roasts, steak and kidney puddings and stews; on rare occasions, we had sweet (desert), usually suet pudding or boiled rice that had to be solid as we turned our dinner plates over and had it on the other side. (So if you hadn't eaten all the main meal, you didn't get a sweet.) We had bread and jam or dripping for tea. She would cut the loaf of bread, holding it to her breast and slicing it towards her chest, then deal it out to us like a pack of cards!!

Sunday was special! The shrimp man came round to sell us cockles and winkles. We would take the pin out of our knickers and use it to get the winkles out; we only had six each and I put one in each corner of my bread and two in the middle to make a lovely sandwich. We always had jelly and custard. The jelly would be put on the window sill to set; I have known mum to make as many as three jellies in one day, as on many occasion the one on the sill would be knocked, or blown off (many times by mum when she was calling us from the window to come in); sometimes in the summer it wouldn't set, but I never knew why she was bothered when it didn't set, as she poured hot custard on it anyway!! The dried eggs helped, it was lovely. Mum would sell the sweet rations to aunt Doll. She only had the one son, David, lucky him to get the sweets. She did really well juggling the rations, which lasted all of my childhood.

When I was ten, Roy, a friend of my brother Ron's, was playing in our hallway with a catapult. I was sitting at the top of the stairs when a stone was fired up the stairs and hit me in the eye. I was rushed to St Nicholas Hospital and later transferred to Moorefield Eye Hospital in the City of London. I was there for a very long time and not allowed visitors. I thought nobody wanted me because I could not see. Then one day, I heard someone coughing, and I knew it was my nan; I went to the fire escape and there she was, bless her! She had walked up the five flights of stairs and told me no one was allowed to visit me, as it would probably upset me; I felt better then, knowing I had not been forgotten.

When I eventually came home, it was winter. I had to start my new secondary school at Church Manorway wearing dark glasses; didn't I just have the mickey taken out of me. I was standing in the dinner queue when a girl asked me why I was wearing sunglasses in the winter. I was just telling her about it all when a teacher called me out of the queue, told me



off for talking and then made me stand on the stage until everyone had finished their lunch. I knew then that I wasn't going to like this school, and I did play truant on many occasions.

Ron passed his eleven plus exam and went onto St Olives Grammar School (London Bridge) one of the very few in the area. Colleges and University were hard to get into then, especially if you were poor. Mum was fit to burst with pride, even with the extra pressures, expense and worry of trying to keep up with the uniforms of a fast growing lad: these had to be bought from a 'posh' extravagant shop. It was grey, silver and purple; if he was seen without his cap on, he was put on detention and had to go to school on Saturdays; of course he was fair game for the taunting from the local boys. The loan club and Provident (another type of loan club) was a great help to keep up with the added expenses, as was the Pawnshop. Mum was used to ducking and diving, robbing Peter to pay Paul. She never had any money but always seemed to manage to make ends meet and still enjoy life.

She worked in the Woolwich Arsenal during the war and had various jobs afterwards, some of which were in the 'Jam' and also the 'Biscuit' factory, which provided nice things for our tea, and the rope factory. But what was really good was when she worked as an usherette in the cinema. She would run down the aisle with her gold cape flowing behind her and the kids would shout out, "da da da bat-woman oo oo"!! We were so proud of her. We always knew when dad was in the cinema; he would sit in the back row asleep, snoring very loudly. He could be in there for hours, as the film would run continually all night without a break. These were just some of her jobs.

Nan sometimes took me to the Empire Cinema! We would sit up in the 'gods'; it was like climbing a mountain. In the interval a light would shine round and stop on someone. It stopped on nan one-night and she won a glass biscuit barrel. Another time, 'Jack and the Beanstalk' was on, and when Jack sold the cow I cried so much that nan had to take me home.

I had two 'best' friends at school, Sylvia and June: they made going to school bearable. In the lunchtime, we would visit the local park during the summer months to torment the park keeper. You were supposed to be accompanied by an adult as half the park was fenced off and it had lovely flowerbeds, crab apple trees and a large fish pond. We would not have destroyed anything but he would always chase us out. It was different in the winter; he would be in his warm hut and wasn't inclined to come out just to chase us toe rags, so we were able to skate on the pond in peace!

Sometimes we went over the railway lines and onto the marshes, where the gypsies often chased us off. If they caught us they would cover us in mud and warn us not to trespass on their terrain! We would then make our way back to school.

Opposite Church Manorway School was St Nicholas' Church and cemetery. The church has a history dating back to the Norman times. In the winter, when it was dark, on our way home from school, we would dare one another to run through the churchyard. To get into the cemetery I would climb the wall that had no railings as they had been removed during the war. It contained a disused graveyard, which after dark was very spooky to us children. It had many old and broken gravestones, but you couldn't let your mates see that you were scared, so you moved as fast as possible through the thick undergrowth. The large trees

would block out any fading light that was left, and therefore you couldn't always see the entrances to the vaults, so if you weren't careful you could fall into them. Shapes and sounds loomed out of the darkness and it seemed to take forever to get to the other side. We were very brave! However, I was always thinking about a man in a funny hat when I ran through there. He used to come around the houses selling things such as silk ties. He was a black man and wore a turban. Nan would always call us when he was coming up the road. "Quick, here comes the black man with the funny hat", she would say, and we would all look at him but stand back out of the way.

The churchyard has now been landscaped, and is quite picturesque. Lush grass has now replaced the old graveyard that has been transformed into a lovely place with neat paths that wind their way between the few trees that are remaining. The headstones are now arranged around and lean against the boundary wall. The church also has been cleaned and looks lovely.

At home, we didn't have electricity, so there was no TV, gramophone, phones etc. to pay out for. We did have a wireless that had to have a battery and an accumulator to make it work. The accumulator had to be charged up at least once a week.

Two of us would take it to the shop to exchange it for one that had been charged. One would carry it and the other to guard it, as we had been told that if we dropped it, it would 'Blow Up'. Of course, I was the first to drop it!! We ran to the nearest wall and stayed there for nearly two hours, waiting for the bang that never came. We were still scared of the sulphuric acid inside.

When it was due to be charged, we would leave it to the last possible minute and had to sit on the dresser to hear how Dick Barton (a favourite programme of the time) ended before taking it to be exchanged. The large HT battery that was also in the wireless lasted a long time, and when it was really on its last legs, we put it in the oven, (not to be recommended now) which seemed to give it a bit of a boost for a short while, we then got another new battery on tick!



*My wedding at St Margaret's Church, Plumstead Common, on the 26<sup>th</sup> October 1957. Photo: Barbara Sullivan.*

# *Beasley's Brewery ... An Ale Tale*

*Roger Jewiss*

My grandfather was a blacksmith and during the Depression found work a bit hard to find. He was pleased to get two days work to do a repair in the brewery.

All employees were given two brass tokens a day, which they could exchange for a pint of beer. My grandfather, very hot at his temporary forge, had used his tokens and was indeed very pleased when a brewery worker called down to him, "Fancy a pint blacky?" "not 'arf," replied my grandfather. Soon after, a copper vessel came slowly down from the vat above, on a long wire, and my grandfather gratefully quenched his thirst. "Thanks," he shouted back to his new friend, "that certainly was a long pint." "PINT!" came the reply, "that vessel held a GALLON!"



*Beasley's Brewery entrance, Lakedale Road, Plumstead. c1960's.  
Photo: Richard Dixey.*

# *Before And After The War Years In Plumstead And Woolwich*

*Jennifer Mellor (nee Batcock)*



Looking back I suppose my education during the war years was a bit 'hit and miss'. I was four years old when it started and ten when it finished. I had already been to nursery school at Wickham Lane School for a while, but can't remember much about that. When all the children in cities were evacuated on the Friday before Chamberlain's speech, my sister and I, along with my mother and grandmother, were put on a train with dozens of other children, babies and mothers and ended up at Barming in Kent. I think we were only there a couple of weeks and I can't remember going to any school. When we returned to London I spent some time at Wickham Lane School again.

Most of the war we stayed in Plumstead, but after the Battle of Britain we four all departed to Devon, under our own steam. We had several shortish spells in Devon during the next five years, coming back to Plumstead when things quietened down and going back to Devon when things took a turn for the worse, for example when the Flying Bombs (doodlebugs) started, and again when the V2 Rockets started.



*VE Party, Grasdene Road. Chairs were set out in a 'V' shape - V for Victory! Jennifer is the girl at the apex of the V, on the left, facing camera, with the glasses.*

*Photo: Jennifer Mellor.*

Once I reached seven years of age I started going to Purrett Road School, now called Gallions Mount. I have a feeling that we either went for just mornings or just afternoons. I can't remember who the Head teacher was then; whether it was a man or a woman, I haven't a clue; but I do remember some of the teachers. One was Mr Paton, who had his favourites, but I do remember he used to read to us 'Tom Sawyer' and 'Huckleberry Finn' and made it sound so exciting that it instilled in me a love of books and reading that has lasted all my life, so I am grateful to him for that. Another teacher I remember was a Mrs Murgatroyd, who was a bit formidable. I particularly remember Miss Stephenson, who was strict, but fair. Gallions Mount School was in those days (I don't know if it has been rebuilt now) a large Victorian building with big classrooms with very high ceilings, and the floor was staggered with wide shallow steps in rows where the desks stood. The naughty boys always used to sit at the back and if any of them were behaving badly and didn't take any notice of her first warning, Miss Stephenson would march to the back of the room, drag the offending boy down to the front by his ear, and bash his head against the blackboard. She wouldn't get away with it now; she would be sued by the parents and probably be dismissed.

In the basement of Gallions Mount School during the war years was a Rescue Centre set up to shelter the people who had been bombed out of their homes. I don't think it was called a Rescue Centre then, the proper term evades me, (Rest Centre) but that is what it was. There were lots of mattresses and blankets there, and I believe refreshments could be obtained. I do remember us all taking shelter there when there were air raids. The girls' playground seemed huge to me then. On one side there was a very high brick wall, and believe it or not, there was a farm the other side. I don't think there were animals, but there were orchards. The toilets in the playground never failed to freeze up every winter.

In 1946 I took what we then called the 'School Scholarship', later called the 11-Plus. There were three papers we took then, Arithmetic, English Language and, I think, General Knowledge. I did fairly well in English and General Knowledge, but my Arithmetic let me down, so I semi passed the scholarship. In those days, in London, there were three types of secondary schools: Grammar School, Secondary Central and Secondary Modern. In Plumstead the grammar school for girls was Kings Warren, or The Brown School, because their uniform was brown. I went to the Woolwich Secondary Central School for Girls. In 1946 this was based in Bloomfield Road, and adjoined Woolwich Secondary Central School for Boys. We were kept strictly apart and no fraternizing!



696 Trolleybus.

Photo: Ron Bramble.

I got the 696 trolley bus from Wickham Lane to Burrage Road. Then a long walk up hill to school. Going home was all down hill and in summer we'd stop at a sweet shop where we bought sarsaparilla, orange squash and soft drinks by the glass. The school curriculum was a real eye-opener. We were taught subjects hardly touched on in Primary School. The school also taught commercial subjects such as shorthand, typewriting and bookkeeping. Having different teachers and different classrooms for each subject was a real novelty. In 1948 the girls' school moved to another school, in Ancona Road. It became Waverley Secondary School for Girls. Some girls from the original Ancona Road School joined us. I believe the boys from that school moved to our old school in Bloomfield Road. I

think this was the start of 'Comprehensive Education'. Most teachers came with us and were joined by staff from the old Ancona Road School. We soon settled in to the new school.

Depending on the weather, I went to school by bus, along Plumstead High Street, to Lakedale Road, and walked up the hill, or went by 53 bus from Plumstead Bus Garage, up King's Highway over Plumstead Common. When I got my first bicycle I'd cycle there occasionally, or I'd walk, cutting through the Ravine. This brought you out near the pre-fab houses on the Common. They seemed quite luxurious to us then, as they had fitted kitchens and fridges! This was a pleasant walk, once past Mackintosh's Soft Drink Bottling plant; quite countrified.

Saturday morning pictures. My friends and I never missed a week. More often than not we would go to the Odeon in Welling, sometimes the Odeon or the Granada in Woolwich. We never went to The Kinema in Plumstead (later called the Century). For 6d (5 cents) you really got your money's worth. The programme usually started with a Disney cartoon, followed by an interest film, then a feature film (usually a western), finishing with a serial. Each episode ended in a cliff-hanger, so you had to go again the following week to see how the hero got out of his predicament. In the 1940s, the cinema was a great place for entertainment. Most cinemas, especially the smaller ones, changed their programmes mid-week. There were always continuous performances, so you could go into the cinema in the middle of the film, see the end, and then wait for it to come round again to see the beginning and then up to where you came in. So you knew how it ended as soon as it restarted! My grandmother was a great cinema fan. She often took me with her. We must have seen all the MGM musicals and Betty Gable films. We loved all the singing and dancing. Plumstead had another cinema, called the Plaza, just along from Lakedale Road. This had once been a Methodist Hall - my mother and father was married there in 1933, but due to a change in its fortunes it was turned into a cinema. I seem to recall that the floor of the cinema was level, not sloping like other cinemas, so if you were sitting near the back it was difficult to see the screen. I remember my father taking me there to see Laurence Olivier in "Henry V."

When I was about 14 my father acquired a bicycle for me. It wasn't new, but I treasured it. Later on I'd cycle into the Kent countryside with friends. In those days, around Dartford and Bexley we used to think we were in the heart of the country. When I first got my bike I rode round the block. Every street had a 'pig bin', where people put scrap food in, to feed local pigs. This particular day I decided to shut my eyes and ride round and, you've guessed it, I went straight into the pig bin, knocking it over, falling off my bike, and landing in the contents of the bin! I didn't do anything so silly again!

The winter of 1946/47 was one of the worst of the 20th century. The first lot of snow fell just before Christmas, before we broke up from school. I can remember walking home across the Common with friends in a terrible blizzard. We decided to cut the corner of the Slade off by going through the Ravine. The snow was so heavy that we got completely disoriented. It was what we now call a "white-out". We couldn't see any landmarks at all. Eventually we did manage to get back to the road, all looking like snowmen, and absolutely frozen! This bout of snow thawed, but more heavy falls in the New Year had snow piled on the ground until the middle of March. This dreadful weather was all the worse because of food rationing (I would say we had more shortages then than we had during the war). Bread was rationed, and I

believe potatoes were too. Everybody relied on coal to heat their homes in those days, but the stockpiles of coal were frozen in the coal yards and couldn't be moved. So there was a shortage of coal too. The power stations also relied on coal, so there was a shortage of electricity, with many power cuts. It was awful; I hope I never have to go through anything like that again My father bought an oil heater and we kept that going. This was heated by paraffin, so, being the eldest, I had to walk down Wickham Lane carrying the oil can to buy paraffin to an ironmonger's shop at the bottom of the Lane.

Because of all the power cuts and coal shortages schools couldn't be heated, so had to close during the worst of the weather. We children didn't mind this at all! It left us free to go to "Fanny-on-the-Hill" and go tobogganing. My friend Glenis had a large sledge made out of curved pieces of old air raid bunker iron. You could get three passengers on this and we had wonderful times dragging it up the hill and hurtling down on it, more often than not landing up in a ditch and getting scratched by brambles! We would be there until it got dark, only going home when we were hungry.



This was a dreadful winter and when the thaw came, in the middle of March, it was so rapid that it caused very bad floods in many parts of the country. This was followed by a wonderful summer, surely to compensate us for the hard, bitter winter. I went on holiday with my friend Glenis and her parents to Bournemouth and the weather was very hot and sunny. We had a wonderful time.

At Waverley School we had to work hard. We had lots of homework every night and especially at weekends. This homework had to be in on time; if it wasn't, woe betide you. I loved English, French, History and Biology, but Mathematics I found difficult. After our second year we dropped Algebra and Geometry, which I hated and couldn't get to grips with. I mastered basic maths in the end, doing quite well when taking the RSA School Certificate. The shorthand and typing stood me in good stead all my life. I stayed on at school until I was 16. There were only 11 of us in the class of 1951 when I left school.

A strange thing occurred when I was about 15 at Ancona Road. Our classroom had been a Science lab. with large desks with Bunsen burners set in them. At the back was a small anteroom where Miss Stevenson, our form mistress, kept a projector. There were large glass-fronted cupboards down one side of the room. One lunchtime a friend Jose and I went back to the class to get something. As we looked through the glass door I saw someone standing at the back of the room. As we opened the door she looked up and smiled. When we got into the room there was no sign of anyone! I said to Jose, "That's funny, I could have sworn someone was in the room." She said, "So could I". We hunted everywhere: under the tables, behind the cupboards, in the anteroom; but the room was empty. This wasn't a reflection that we both saw. The figure was solid. I'm not a fanciful person, but I can't explain this mystery.

When I think of the things schoolchildren get away with now at school, it is like another world. The school rules at Waverley had to be obeyed. We had to wear school uniform at all times; no jewellery (only watches). Part of the uniform was a navy beret, which we had to wear summer and winter on our way to and fro school. One girl was spotted by a teacher

throwing her beret in the air whilst on a bus. She was hauled over the coals for doing that when she got to school the next day. If you did anything wrong, you got a 'D' for Detention. If you excelled at anything you got an A plus. If you got either of these your name would be read out to the whole school during Morning Assembly. I lived in fear of getting a 'D', but luckily I never did.

My father was a great one for taking us on local walks. We lived near to Bostall Woods. We often went there. He taught us a lot about trees and wildlife, especially birds. We often went to Rockcliffe Gardens. It was said these gardens were built on the site of old chalk workings, so no houses could be built there. These chalk workings covered a large area and several houses in Alliance Road



were unoccupied for years, as the story was that a hole had appeared in the garden of one of them and had swallowed up a baby in a pram. Whether this was true or not I don't know, but I do know that these chalk mines extended as far as Grasdene Road. At the time of my marriage, there was a hole fenced off in the road and the chalk workings were being filled in to make the whole area safe.

Now and again we would go on the Woolwich Free Ferry and go over the river. Older people always talked of "going over the water" when they went to North Woolwich. Often, my father and I would go on a bus to London visiting the museums. We both shared a love of history.

My younger sisters followed me to Waverley School: Gillian in 1949, and Frances in 1956, so all three of us were there at any one time. My father had also attended the school, when it was still called Ancona Road, in the years after the First World War. I believe the old school was knocked down some years ago and a new one built on the site.

When I left school in 1951 I first worked in London Wall. I travelled to Cannon Street every day. Later I worked at Unilever House, Blackfriars, where I stayed for eight years. I was working there when I married at St Nicholas' Church in 1957. The wedding reception was held at the Co-op Hall, Lakedale Road. After I married I moved away from the area.

There is no reason now to go back to Plumstead; my parents are both dead and most of my friends have moved away - apart from Glenis who still lives in the same house in Grasdene Road (2006). I am sure there are lots of changes, and sometimes it is best to hold on to memories and not cover old ground, which may have changed out of all recognition.

# *Bernard Dibble Recalls His Early Years.*

*Bernard Dibble*

Memories of war years in Plumstead from 1941 aged five years.

I lived at 12 Piedmont Road, Plumstead, with my mother, father and sister in the ground floor of a Victorian house.

We had one open fire and gas lighting. I had brothers born in 1941, 1943 and 1945. The flat upstairs was occupied by a family called Pool, a family of five.

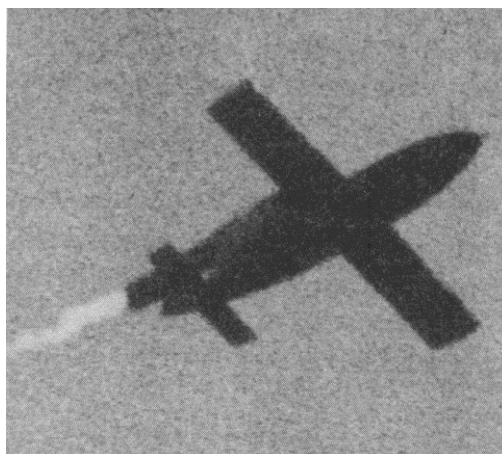
There was one outside toilet only, which was shared by everyone.

In 1943 Stanley Pool, the son, who was in a Tank Regiment was killed and so also was the only son of Mr And Mrs Tucker, who lived next door at 14 Piedmont Road, whilst serving in the RAF. There was much sadness on VE day when a street party was held in Liffler Road.

My father worked for Payne's, a builder in Leghorn Road, and he also served in the ARP on Fire Watch duty throughout the war.

None of the children in my family were evacuated during the war.

During the V1 rockets (doodlebug era) my father would hold me up to the front door fanlight to watch the flames from the rocket, hoping they would not cut out near to our home. We had a Morrison shelter and also there were Anderson air raid shelters where I attended Infants school at Conway Road. It was closed for 8-10 months in 1941 and then until 1943 to house families who had been bombed out locally.



*V1 'Doodlebug' in flight.*

My dad made me a gambol from an old pram. We had races down Piedmont Road.

One night, after heavy bombing raids, I went to the top of Piedmont Road into Heavitree Road where there was a group of Alms houses. These had had a direct hit with loss of life (I do not recall the date) I believe there was many killed.

As a child I recall that I was always hungry, I must have been one of the only kids at Conway Road School to look forward to the daily dose of cod liver oil and malt. We had to have our own spoon and paid thru'pence a week for the privilege. School dinners were sixpence. My dad could not afford this.

Most of the kids in my class had head lice. We went regularly to Plumstead Baths, Riverdale Road to visit the "nit nurse" who washed our heads in foul smelling brown stuff. About six weeks later they were back again!

I then went to Ancona Road School with my best mate Frank Ward. He is in the Ancona

Road photograph of 1946. (See: *Some Schools Remembered.*)

Frank was an only child, his father was an officer in the RAF and he was always well dressed and had socks, something I did not have.

I remember wearing plimsolls to school, due to lack of shoes, and wearing cut down trousers, no underpants and very chapped thighs.

I managed at ten years old to get a paper round at Philpott's newsagents shop in Brewery Road, at five shillings a week, starting at 5.30 - 6.00 am summer and winter, without breakfast and only a holey jumper to keep out the cold.

Mrs Philpott used to make us tea and sweeten it with syrup. It was foul tasting but it was hot.

On Saturday I helped the milkman deliver and was paid one shilling. I had fish and chips on pay day from Simmons's fish shop on Plumstead High Street, cost of one shilling.

Pictures at the Cinema or the Plaza, Plumstead, cost ninepence. Sometimes the films stopped because of bombing raids; sometimes they closed for weeks at a time.

I joined the local Cub-Scouts at Griffin Road, Baptist Church, the Minister was the Rev'd Hallworth. Someone donated a cap, a woggle, scarf and socks and I was in, albeit with holes in my only pair of trousers. There were many happy times after that, even a yearly coach ride into the country for a whole day out. Such pleasures!

Eventually I went to Plum Lane School in 1947-48? We walked from Plum Lane School to Plumstead Baths, a distance of about three miles, cutting across Winn's Common. Swimming lessons were once a week for poor families like myself; this guaranteed at least a bath once a week, albeit without soap. People went to Plumstead Riverdale Road Bath House in those days, at one shilling a bath, sometimes putting three to four kids in the bath at the same time.



*Plum Lane School, an early photo.*

At eleven years of age my world changed, my father bought me a second hand bike for ten shillings. I could not reach the saddle but I tied some cloth around the cross bar. The world was my oyster. We would cycle to Eynsford in Kent or to Dartford Common. One day I went to the Woolwich Ferry, I intended to cycle to Enfield, in Middlesex, but was stopped and brought home by a Police Officer.

I remember going to school and collecting pieces of shrapnel on the way that had fallen from the previous nights bombing raids. These were swapped at school for conkers, sweets, marbles and similar items. My friends from Plum Lane School would meet in the summer after school and play games in the houses that had been bombed out locally. Their names were Roy Weston, Gilbert Buttery, Brian Dunford, John Harris, Fred Lewis, Frank Ward,

Karl Bowsen. They came from Piedmont Road, Villas Road, Macoma Terrace, which were all local.

When I was about ten years old my mother used to push a pram with the two youngest inside and my brother Charles and me walking either side of her from Plumstead to Woolwich. We did this on a weekly basis to Furlongs to pay the rent. Occasionally I pushed the pram from Plumstead to Danson Park, Welling, with my young brothers Charles and Brian inside, having a shilling to spend between us and a bottle of R Whites lemonade. This took all day.

My job once a fortnight was to take the accumulators for the battery radio in for charging. There was a shop that did this at the end of Brewery Road. Us kids were allowed to listen to the radio from 6.45-7pm when Dick Barton Special Agent was broadcast, but at no other time.

When I was between five and eleven years old I had Pneumonia on two occasions and was looked after by a lady at 15 Piedmont Road, a Mrs Vigis. I stayed at her house during these illnesses, she saved my life.

There was a wood yard on the corner of Piedmont Road and Brewery Road. A fenced off yard in-between houses, with a small lock up shed at the back. A man called George owned it. He sold everything from potatoes to paraffin, everything smelled of paraffin.

He was there throughout the war. At night we boys would climb the fence, take empty lemonade bottles to return them the next day for the tuppence deposit on the bottles.

Plumstead, being well above sea level, the fires in the dock areas and of inner London could easily be seen at night during the war, especially around the docks, both north and south of the Thames.

At the bottom of Barth Road there was a large piece of land owned by the London County Council (LCC) with hundreds of pigs on it. We boys used to go to see them being fed. We would come back smelling awful.

I think that just about sums up some of my younger years. Sometimes very sad, but at other times laughter also played a big part of living in a large but poor family.

R A D I O			
GENERAL FORCES		HOME	
6.30 a.m.: News; Records.	3.30: Melody Lingers On.	7 a.m.: News.	3.45: British Band of A.E.F.
7: Record Album.	4: News; Navy Mixture.	7.15: Exercises.	4.15: Hunting of the Snark.
8: News; Records	5: News; Dorset Farmer.	7.30: Records.	4.30: Jack Simpson.
8.30: Music in the Morning.	5.30: Facts and Figures.	7.55: Lift Up Your Hearts!	5: News in Welsh.
9: News; London Calling.	5.50: Scottish Orch.	8: News; Around the House.	5.20: Children's Hour
9.30: Records.	7: News; Celebrations Sound Picture.	8.20: Records.	6: News; Massed Brass Bands
10: Wagner.	7.15: Orchestra	9: A Home Guard Looks Back	7: Billy Cotton.
10.30: Band of Royal Corps of Signals	8: Off the Map	9.15: Monday Morning Medley	7.40: The Invasion
11: Auld Scotch Sangs.	8.30: A d e l e Dixon.	10.5: Schools	8: Monday Night at Eight
11.30: Billy Cotton.	9: News; Midland Light Orch.	10.15: Service.	9: News; Soldiers of Britain.
12: News; Service	9.45: Pre-Service Boxing.	10.30: Foursomes	10.5: Elgar's 2nd Symphony.
12.15: Music for All.	9.55: Sandy Macpherson.	11: Schools.	11: Orchestra.
1: News; Records	10: Welsh Half-Hour.	12.20: Jose Iturbi.	11.40: Buddy Featherstonhaugh.
1.20: Will Hay.	10.30: Reg. Purs-glove.	12.30: Break for Music.	12-12.20: News.
1.50: Parliamentary Summary.	10.58: News.	1: News; Arctic Escort.	
2: Victory Music-Hall.		1.30: London Theatre Orch.	
3.15: Chief Inspector French's Cases.		1.40: Schools.	
		3: Marriage of Figaro	

# *Beware Of The Ghost Of The Christmas Blast!*

*Albert Richard (Bert) Hooper*

As was usual on most Christmas mornings, dad went down to the local pub nice and early. He needed plenty of time to wish all of his many drinking friends the best of the season, not to mention the extra time necessary to help the publican hand out the customary free drinks.

Although the pub closed for the afternoon at 2:00pm, his return was not expected until 2:35pm. This allowed him roughly 10 minutes after the bell had been rung to finish his drink; 10 minutes saying good-bye to everyone on the steps outside the pub, just in case their paths never crossed again; and 15 minutes to stroll up the hill, with numerous stops along the way, to daydream and ponder the meaning of life, as he gazed at the view over



*1934, Mabel Phobe Hooper.*



*1934, Arnold Francis Hooper.*

the River Thames and the docklands of London.

Many would say that this tradition of his was very selfish, but dad would simply explain his actions away by saying that it gave the children time to play with their new toys and mother the necessary time and space she needed to prepare the Yule Time Feast.

His arrival home would be closely followed at 2:40pm by his traditional carving, or maybe I should say hacking and slashing, of the chicken. I think I was almost 12 years old before I discovered that it was possible to at least cut the breast of a chicken, and other fowl, into

slices. I should also point out that because of wartime rationing and the burden of raising four children, turkey and goose didn't appear in our house until the late fifties.

Consumption of the meal was usually at 3:00pm, sharp. This, you understand, was only after we had all snatched and blurted out our tales of how various new toys had been broken in the mayhem of sibling war, that always erupted with the discovery of each other's new treasures during dad's absence. With mother preoccupied with slaving away in the kitchen and a deadline to meet, it was open season and everything was fair game. Only the arrival of nan and uncle Tom would bring about an instant armistice.

Nan had an evil look in her knowing eyes that made you feel instantly guilty of crimes you'd never even thought of committing. One penetrating glance from her and your memory banks went into hyper-giga-mega-overdrive just trying to think of that one small action that you had done that day which she might not have approved of.

This Christmas Day was no different, and we all held our breath and stood to attention during her inspection of the disaster area that was once our rarely used front parlour. Following her tour of the tribe, she adjourned to the kitchen and assisted mother in her, often thankless, task. This was the point that Christmas really began for us though, the annual visit from uncle Tom, and we had him all to ourselves.

Uncle Tom, my mother's stepfather, was never truly accepted as part of our family and was only tolerated in our home at Christmas.

I was told that he treated his two, much younger, daughters, Sheila and Alma somewhat better than their older step-sister, our mother, and her brother Bert, who had been killed in the Second World War.

This, I later discovered, was an excuse to mask nan's cruel streak, that had been most evident to the neighbours who'd heard the all too often screams and cries of Sheila and Alma, as she thrashed them with a thick copper stick used for washing. They would then be subjected to being thrown into the cupboard under the stairs, and left locked in there for hours on end. This cruelty went on for years and years, with the neighbours retreating into their other neighbour's home at times, to avoid being subjected to the sound of these atrocities.

Uncle Tom was a very soft-mannered man, and extremely slow to anger, but when he discovered the reasons for the bruises on the legs of his daughters, he quite rightly erupted with anger about such wicked treatment at the hands of nan.

As is often the case with this kind of dysfunctional behaviour in a family, my parents felt obligated to side with nan and, probably not wanting to acknowledge her cruel ways, had allowed uncle Tom to become nan's scapegoat.

These actions, or lack of the recognition of the truth, caused a subtle division within an otherwise potentially genuine and loving extended family that is only now learning the whole truth and is starting to reunite again.

On reading about these events, a cold shiver went right through my whole body, as I remembered those long-buried memories within me, of being threatened with being locked in that dark cupboard under our stairs, by nan, when our mother was away.

Our mother went shopping most days, or she would kill and skin rabbits at a house on Lakedale Road, as a way to put extra food on the table. Because of this, there were countless times where I often had to endure the wrath of nan.

My mother's father had died from the effects of tuberculosis, one Christmas Day, and because so many men had died during, or in the years that followed the First World War, I understand that there were not many single men around for our freshly widowed nan.

She jumped at the opportunity to obtain a second husband and a breadwinner for her two teenage children, which also meant that she'd not be forced to work outside of the home, and so that she could also spend a life being supported by a very kind and soft uncle Tom.

Being children, we knew nothing of these family dynamics and so the four of us just accepted nan's unkind ways, I must say, however, that we worshipped the presence of uncle Tom, and indeed his very presents.

Uncle Tom belonged to a different time and place. He usually wore a suit, and remarks about his suits gave us the impression that he wore the same thing every day. He did a fine job of perpetuating this myth about himself, by only buying new clothes that were similar to the ones in his existing wardrobe. We were told that he only took a bath when forced into submission by nan, or when his cat refused to come near him any more.

All these false statements were no doubt aimed in his direction in jest, to justify the division within the family, when, in actual fact, uncle Tom was an extremely well dressed man with lovely distinguished looking grey hair, and a permanent tan from working outdoors for the Borough Council, and in many people's gardens, and also his own.

He told us wonderful tales, and he talked with passion and romance in his voice as he'd spin all manner of yarns. We believed that uncle Tom had been everywhere it was possible to go and seen everything there was to ever see. He was our hero and, as usual, we draped ourselves all over him as he entranced and entertained us with his stories in front of the glowing fire.

As was his tradition, at a suitable pause in his story-telling, he reached into his large jacket pockets and pulled out a tangerine for each of us to occupy ourselves with, while he prepared his next smoke. The next pause would almost certainly produce a bright thru'penny piece for each of us; these were magical times.

Uncle Tom had a permanent problem with catarrh, no doubt because of his smoking, and he'd developed a habit of spitting into the fire to solve the obvious problem. This day was no different, and he cleared his throat in preparation of resuming his latest tale, and then quickly spat into the embers.

A blinding flash instantly engulfed the whole room and the electric fire suddenly made a loud bang, as uncle Tom's missile shorted out the heating elements to the grounded body of the reflectors. Sparks shot in all directions and the house was suddenly plunged into almost total darkness.

Uncle Tom had not noticed that our fireplace was now home to a beautiful two element electric heater. The fake glowing red coal embers, with a slow moving fan inside, to sort of give the impression of real flames licking up, only added to the look of shock on his face as

he was abruptly introduced to the twentieth century.

As none of us knew how to mend a fuse, we simply sat there in the cold grey light of a dull and damp winter afternoon, waiting for the return of dad at 2:35pm. To make matters even worse, it was the main fuse that had been fried, so our electric cooker now didn't work either, and any ideas of Christmas dinner at 3:00pm sharp were completely out of the question.

Uncle Tom was ejected from the house within two minutes of dad's return and he was never allowed back.

As the atmosphere was now not good in our house that Christmas Day afternoon, I left the house and took my new cap gun around the corner to the Common, and rode my imaginary horse around the locked paddling pool and playground.

The birds in the shrubs around the fence line of the paddling pool were all singing little songs, and did not seem to mind my intrusion into what for them was probably a quiet day.

A lone figure walking a dog, way over on Winn's Common, was the only other person in view that afternoon, and as the grey light began to fade, I knew it was time to head home.

I can't imagine a life without a place like the Common to retreat to, when life's little problems come along.

By the time I got back home, things had finally settled down. We all sat down and had our Christmas feast, but as I mentioned before, it was without uncle Tom, and we all knew not to mention the subject.

Being children, we all missed him terribly, so it was little wonder that as I grew older I would meet him, every few weeks, for a stroll around the Common. We were all victims of nan and her wicked ways, just as many were victims of that female-dominated society.

Even though nan had been the instigator of so much pain, uncle Tom continued to be a faithful, loving partner, and tended to her every need, through all her years of blindness, right up until her death.

He eventually moved into a home, where Sheila worked, and spent many happy years there with constant visits from Alma, both their husbands, and many grandchildren. It could be said that nan had shown them how not to behave by example, and I'm overjoyed to be reconnected with them, and finally now know the true story.

I really believe that my life is richer because I knew uncle Tom. I also can't help but wonder, however, if all our lives were a little poorer because dad seized the opportunity for what was probably misguided loyalties and foolish revenge.

Christmas is without doubt the most stressful time of the year for many families. Just ask anyone who has had to deal with the loss of a loved one, divorce, missing children or debt.

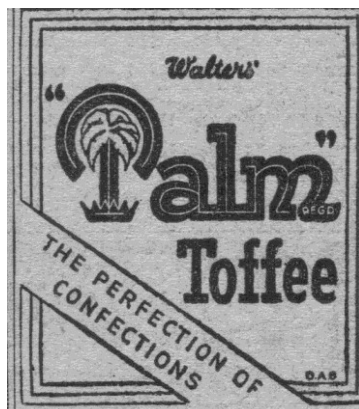
My hope for all of us is that we see all the members of our families as Christmas presents; even the Nan's in our lives, and possibly more so the Uncle Toms.

If we encounter a problem with certain family members at Christmas, let's try sleeping on

it, as it may pass away by the following morning. If it doesn't, please try to avoid taking Boxing Day literally.



*Bert at Timbercroft Primary School.*



# *Blitz Over Plumstead And Districts*

*Iris Hanaford (War letter, 1940)*

This is a letter written by Iris Hanaford to her late friend, Cissie Wild, during the terrible London Blitz of 1940. Iris then lived in Conway Road and worked in Fenchurch Street in Central London during those traumatic times. Iris went on to serve in the WAAF. Cissie was serving in the Women's Land Army.

After Cissie's death a number of years ago, her daughter found the letter and sent a copy of it to Iris. Iris, now Mrs Iris Gildon, lives in Bexhill on Sea.

Dear Cissie,

Thank you very much for your letter and once more I must say I am sorry for not having written for such a long time. Our day now is more or less just an existence. We hardly have time to get up and off go the sirens. If you are lucky enough to still be here when the "all clear" goes you endeavour to proceed to work. You get there or sometimes nearly get there, and off go the sirens again. So down to the cellars you go to spend an hour or however long it is, knitting or reading and in general getting a sore seat. When you emerge and get to the office, there is no post in, and either Mr J. or Mr S. have not arrived, so there is nothing to do until they come. On Monday Mr S. had the key to the safe and as he did not come in there was nothing we could do. After that to be on the safe side Mr J. took it. Then they messed up his line to London and he didn't arrive until midday. We usually have a lunchtime raid; in fact if it doesn't come we think something is up. Then we usually get an afternoon one about 3 or 4 o'clock. That makes it hard to get home. The other day we had one at twenty to four and this went on until about ten to five. We got back to the office and did the post and were just going down in the lift when the siren went again. After that we managed to get home. When one gets home there is time to have something to eat, have a wash and as soon as darkness begins to fall, off we go again for the whole of the night, that is until 5.30, 5.45 or 6 o'clock. From the foregoing you will gather why I haven't written.

So far today we have been lucky, it is eleven and up to now we have heard no sirens. I think we will hear it soon as planes are buzzing about now. I have just been out to see if I can see any but it is too cloudy and as the sun is rather bright they are probably making use of that.

Last Saturday when they dropped the bomb in Galloson Road they dropped them in Mineral Street too, and what an ear splitting row they made. Fortunately, dad was in the garden watching and he saw the bombs released and he came in and told us to get under the table or somewhere. As we have a bed downstairs Hilda and I got under that. Then we just had to lay and listen to it whistling through the air until it landed and the house shook and the noise hurt our ears. Ever so many houses had their windows blown out and slates blown off too, but

so far all we have is a pane of glass cracked in our French windows. Since then the gunfire has been so heavy that it has shaken a lot of the ceilings down. Not in our house, but in some of the houses along the road.

Well I am now writing this in Mrs Earle's shelter, she has got hers up indoors. As you will gather by me taking shelter, the sirens have gone and although planes are thundering around overhead nothing has happened yet. I have been caught down at Hilda's twice during an all night raid. Those shelters are O.K. for an hour or two but eight or nine hours is too much. Well the guns are going it now, but so far we haven't heard any bombs drop.

We had some excitement the Saturday before last. A Messerschmitt 109 (hope that spelt right) was brought down in Ann Street. A Spitfire was after it and a dogfight went on overhead, then down it came making a horrible row. One wing came off and sailed just over our house. Dad thought it would land in the road but it just cleared the houses on the other side of the road and landed in a garden in Hector Street. The rest of the plane crashed in the gardens of two houses. It caught fire so that it was not much to look at. The cockpit buried itself about 3ft in the ground so a fireman told us when we went to see it. We could only see the ends of the propeller as it was buried. There was a yellow dragon with red claws painted on the little bit of the cockpit that we could see. The rest of the plane was such a mess you couldn't tell what was what. The people started a Spitfire Fund and let people in to see it. They collected about £96. There was a fund started to see the wing too, but that was only left there for a day, so they didn't get so much.

A train was bombed on the line behind Reidhaven Road and messed up the railway so that trains only ran from Charlton. Then next day (Tuesday) trains ran down to Plumstead at night. On Wednesday trains only ran from Charlton. After Sunday and several raids throughout the day trains ceased to run anywhere and all services were suspended from London Bridge. So at 5.30 on Wednesday (incidentally our time is now whatever time we get there in the morning until 4 in the afternoon, air raids permitting). On Wednesday air raids did not permit and I was stuck outside London Bridge with a notice saying "All services suspended, passengers must make their own way" staring me in the face. After a few minutes I bumped into Fisher and we decided to try and get home some way or the other together. We tried Tooley Street way but there were no trams running. So many roads are roped off because of time bombs that even trams, buses and cars can't go properly along their usual route. We then decided to try buses to Elephant & Castle but the queues for these were so long we would have stood there all night. The buses that were coming were too full to stop for more so we had to walk to the Elephant & Castle. Then there were no buses that we could get on, they weren't stopping and there were no trams either. Then we met Eileen R. and she came with us. We decided to walk at least part of the way, but when we had walked a little way we saw a C.W.S.\* cattle van and as lots of other vans were giving people a lift, and as this van already had two men on it, Fisher asked the driver where he was going. Luckily he was going to Woolwich, so we

jumped in. It was very clean inside with just straw on the floor and railings all round the top. Anyway we got to Woolwich and then we turned out covered in straw and trailed up the road to the trams and eventually we got home.

I didn't have to go in on Thursday as we are going to have a day off a week so that we can get some sleep.

Well the "all clear" has gone now and we are going to have some dinner. Since writing the last sentence I have had my dinner and another air raid. The last one was from 11.45 to 1.00 and the sirens went again at 2.15. There must have been hundreds up there, right overhead. The loudest we have heard with Spitfires chasing all over the place and the noise was deafening and machine guns letting them have it. Anyway we have just heard that one was brought down in the Arsenal. Dad has just come from work and he says one of the men on the roof saw it crash in there. At 3.15 it was all over.

I expect you have heard on the wireless about the new service they are running between Woolwich Ferry and Westminster as all trains have ceased to run. Why I don't know. I wish I did but I expect it is a time bomb or something like that outside London Bridge somewhere. On Friday I went up with Hilda on the boat. We didn't catch it until 9.30 as we had a warning at 7.30. Anyway we had just started out in the wind and rain when the sirens went off again. Guns were firing all up the river and the journey took two hours. When I got to Tower Pier I walked towards the office and as I almost got there guns started firing and the wardens hauled me in. I stayed in for about an hour and a half and then when it was quiet I crept out and got into our own shelter with Miss Drury. I then had time to talk and eat my lunch and after four hours the "all clear" went. That was the longest day raid we have had. I got into the office, had a wash, did one letter and at ten to three Mr S. went to catch his bus home. At ten past three Mr J. was still not in so Fisher and I left and went to Westminster to catch the boat. I had said I would not go home by boat on my own but Fisher said I could go with him. We got there at 3.30; the boat was due at 3.50, the last leaving at 4.30. The boat hadn't come at 4 o'clock and aeroplanes began buzzing overhead again and guns started firing. This went on for about 5 mins. and then once more the sirens went. We got the full benefit of the one on New Scotland Yard. After about 20 mins. the "all clear" went but no boat came. At 4.30 it was seen coming under Waterloo Bridge and about 4.45 we were ready to set out. I was feeling extremely sick, as I expect you can remember what the Thames ozone is like. It took 2 hours to get to Woolwich again during which time it poured with rain and the wind blew a gale. The river was like a tempest and I was freezing cold by the time I arrived home, so I don't think I shall use that method of travel any more if I can get a bus over on the Common. I don't like being in the middle of the Thames when there is an air raid on, and they are not going to stop. I would cycle if the traffic was not diverted so much. You can only get to the bottom of Albion Hill now and then there is a diversion you could go to Charlton at the beginning of the week.

One afternoon this week a lone raider got through and very calmly came down and dropped a bomb on the hospital and another on Buckleys Yard. After this had happened the sirens were sounded. Granddad was in the garden watching the plane when it suddenly released the bombs. Anyway the one on Buckleys caused the traffic to be diverted but it was removed after a time. It was a time bomb. The one on the hospital went into the dining room where all the old men were. The Matron was killed and quite a few of the old men.

Another afternoon they nearly got the Links Stores, but instead the bombs fell in Ennis Road and Tuam Road and also Wernbrook Street. They took the corner right off the Brown School where the A.F.S.\* are stationed. They hit Plum Lane School, A.F.S. there too. Slade School, Barrage Balloon there. Timbercroft Lane, houses down. During the night Durham Road, houses down and 5 killed. Basildon Road, houses down and a great crater in the road. Gas and water mains hit. 8 bombs dropped on that old barn at the bottom of Rochdale Road, just made craters and blew glass out of a passing tram.

On Saturday they hit the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies in Wood Street. Thank goodness no one was hurt. One building of Siemens is gutted out and one or two others I believe and their wharf is smashed up. When they set a fire going on last Saturday afternoon in the Arsenal, they also dropped a bomb on the sewer bank of all places and what a smell there was down that way. I won't bother to describe what it was like in the Arsenal as we have heard too many awful stories about it. Still they hit the Cap and Detonator shop in the Danger Building one night during the week and it was like firework night.

Loader's Margarine factory over the water was hit a week ago and is still burning. Tates sugar factory has been hit twice but still exists. The C.W.S. dairy was hit and we got no milk for two or three days. The office in the Commonwealth Building where you used to work is no more. They managed to save the Grocery Warehouse. Silvertown is nearly down to the ground so most of them have been brought over this way to Conway Road School and other schools. Conway Road School hasn't got a window in it so it must be a bit draughty. Becton Gas Works has been hit so people are evacuated from there.

Lots of buildings are all burnt out in the City and there is a great crater in the road at either end of London Bridge. Our office has survived so far, the nearest hit was Fenchurch Street Station. Most of the buildings along Fenchurch Street have no windows but fortunately we still have.

I can't think of any more to tell you now as it would take a book to write about all that has happened just round here.

I hope you are feeling better now after your collision with a 20 ton lorry and I trust all the family are all right.

Well, we are going to try and have some tea now as we have just heard some more planes go over. Cheerio now as I am closing my letter. Hope you don't get eye strain wading through it.

Love to all,

(Editor's \*) \* AFS = Auxiliary Fire Service

\*CWS = Co-operative Wholesale Society

**BUSY BUBBLE'S HELPING HAND**



**HOW SAFE WASHING  
LIGHTENS YOUR CLOTHES  
WORRIES!**

**MAKE DO AND MEND WASHDAY WISDOM.**

Oxydol, the amazing granulated soap, plays a big part in 'make do and mend', for Oxydol's 'Busy Bubble' lather always washes clothes gently and safely so that they last longer. Oxydol's 'Busy Bubble' lather washes everything spanking clean without hard rubbing — saves your clothes coupons every washday.

*3½d. size—1 coupon. 7d. size—2 coupons. A Class 1 Product. At your shop.*

**REMEMBER**  
This is the third  
week of Ration  
Period No. 1  
(Aug. 8th-14th)



**DON'T FORGET**  
to read Mrs. Mundy's  
Helping Hand. It's on  
the back of your packet  
of Oxydol.

# *Bombed Out Twice*

*Joan Moakes (nee Graves)*

I was 5 years old, the oldest of three children. We lived with my parents in a modern (1930s) semi-detached house on Shooters Hill high ground above Woolwich Arsenal, where war materials like shells were made. This was, of course, a major target for the bombers and the surrounding suburbs were often hit as well.

In what would have been the dining room we had a Morrison Shelter. This was a sort of iron cage with a solid steel roof at about table level and heavy steel mesh sides to keep the occupants safe from flying glass etc. Ours had a double-bed mattress and my younger sister and I were put to bed there every night. When the siren went my parents picked up my baby brother and came down to join us in the Morrison. Quite cosy, except that outside there was the noise of the air raid.

It all seemed quite normal to us children. Most houses suffered some blast damage, for example, ours had several broken windows, which were mended with a fabric (new glass, presumably, was not available).

One night the bomb fell close, destroying some nearby houses. We were all awake it was too noisy to sleep. Then there was an explosion; my mother said, 'Oh dear, there's our poor old house gone west!' There was a great crashing and tinkling. We heard the windows shatter, and there were lots of noises as furniture broke up and doors were blown off.

Inside the Morrison we were unhurt. My parents told us to go back to sleep, which we did! When it got light my father crawled gingerly out of the



*Joan and her sister Gillian outside their house in Shooters Hill, London. Note the blast-damaged windows. The house was later made uninhabitable by bombing.*



*Indoor Morrison Air Raid Shelter doubles as a table.*

shelter, got a broom and swept up the debris. Then we were allowed out. My sister and I rushed excitedly to see what had happened. Most of the furniture was broken up; the front door had slid down the hall, and was leaning against the kitchen wall. All the windows had gone. The sideboard contents were all smashed except, weirdly, two china dolls' heads, which a lady in his office had given to my father. (These later had cloth bodies made for them). My parents were left with three children, no house and very few belongings.

We were taken to a 'Rest Centre' (maybe a Church hall or a school) where for about a week we slept in dormitory accommodation. I thought it was all rather exciting except for one incident. I had a homemade black cloth doll named 'Black Jinny' which had survived the blitz. My mother gave it to a little girl in the Rest Centre who had been orphaned and I was devastated!

After a while (a week or so?) my mother's sister, a nurse, found us a primitive farm cottage near Bideford in Devon. (She ran a hostel for children from East London made homeless by the Blitz). My father saw us off from one of the London stations (I don't know which). I remember a big glass roof with most of the glass gone, that must have suffered from nearby explosions, also a kind lady, who gave us children some cherries (presumably from her garden).

In Devon, I had just started school when we were bombed out! I remember reading lessons by candlelight in a big air-raid shelter. In the Devon cottage my mother would have had to walk over two miles, pushing the pram to get me to school. So I didn't go. Eventually a school Inspector called. My mother was teaching me to read, so having checked us out he agreed that I could continue to learn at home.

Meanwhile, my father, who was a Probation Officer in Lambeth and a member of the Home Guard, slept on a camp bed in his office! Every couple of months he came down on the train to see his family. He wrote to my mother regularly but there was no phone of course, and she never knew until the next letter arrived, if he was safe.

He did survive and Woolwich Council allocated him another house on Shooters Hill at the end of the war. Compared with some families we were lucky.

*I wrote this poem as part of a University of the Third Age poetry group.*

The Me who was a child  
The siren wails  
How nonchalantly I rise from bed  
Trek downstairs  
Tumble into the Morrison  
And fall asleep.  
How little I know of fear  
The me who was a child  
Thinks this is normality.  
One night the bomb drops near  
Windows shatter, furniture splinters  
The front door slides up the hall.  
The child yawns and goes back to sleep

Editors footnote: Picture of Morrison shelter was added to original story.

WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at [bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](http://bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar)



**"WHY ARE YOU WAITING HERE, OLD BOY?"**

**"THE BOSS IS GETTING MY 'CHAPPIE' RATION!"**

No dog minds waiting for Master if it means getting his fair share of the limited supplies of "Chappie" available. Unfortunately "Chappie" must be restricted to old customers until the end of the war. Vets and breeders agree that "Chappie" is the complete, scientifically-balanced all-round diet for dogs. And, if dogs could talk, the lucky ones would probably say to the others: "Sorry fellers, that there's not enough 'Chappie' for all of us these days; but, when the war is over, bark for your 'Chappie' daily."

**SAVE BONES FOR SALVAGE.**  
*BONES — even those your dog has done with — are vital to the war effort. Salvage every scrap and put out for collection.*

In air-tight jars, 1/-

**"CHAPPIE"**



**DOG FOOD**

# *Brian Rake (Rakey) Remembers*

*Brian Rake (2006)*

I can remember joining the Conway School in 1953. In the assembly hall there was a large wall display for the expedition to Antarctica, but my old brain cells cannot remember who went. I seem to remember something about giving money to buy a Husky to pull the sledge.

I didn't like Mr Bull (Headmaster) as I was always in trouble and my name appeared too regularly in the 'Cane Book'. I have no old school photos but still have my reports. My children particularly like the comments from Mr Reeves, "Brian is a noisy and fidgety boy and a nuisance to others around him." I hope I've changed, but I doubt it.



*Bloomfield School. Brian is seated third from right, front row. . Photo: Anne Reen.*

As I said, I have no old photos. I had the original wicked stepmother and when my father died she wouldn't pass anything to me. But I still have those school reports.

Memories are not so good and I have forgotten most of my home life, which was, for the most part, hell. School is a distant memory although I can remember quite a few old names.

Never had money to go into corner shops, unless I bunked over the wall of a local pub, 'borrowed' a few quart bottles and took the empties round the corner for the returns money. That was basically how I got into Saturday morning pictures. Greathead's used to run the local shop on the corner of Parkdale Rd and Chestnut Rise. They had a son but I can't remember his name.

My brother followed two years behind me and was in Mr Givens' class. On his first day in class, Givens showed him the cane register with my name all over it and told

him that he had better be an improvement on his elder brother!

I went on to Bloomfield Road School afterwards, leaving Conway Primary School in 1956 from Olive Hancock's class: a great lady.

I did not attend any clubs and other activities and was not allowed (wicked stepmother again) to play sports for the school. That, together with my two years' probation at approx age nine, for something that I did not do, seemed to make other parents not want to let their children associate with me anyway. Hence I did not have many friends and therefore not many happy memories.

I lived up the top of Parkdale Road, last house on the right. I was easily recognised by my ginger hair, patches in trousers, holes in shoes, stuffed daily with cardboard; but always known by my clowning around, whistling or singing. Three things that have caused annoyance to many people over the years, and still do!

I remember that I used to love going to Bostall Woods and also to the woods in the golf course on Shooters Hill, where I went across the Common and up through the allotments and across into the golf course - peace and quiet - it was great! I also used to hunt for slow worms in the ferns behind where Mr Bull lived on Wynn's Common.

I also got stuck up a tree on the steps leading from St Mark's to the bottom of the hill at the two ponds and had to have the fire brigade out to get me down! I also used to be able to get into St Mark's church hall and camped out in there on many an occasion. Was never caught out either.



*Brian was known affectionally as 'Rakey.'*

**Brian passed away after a short illness on the 6th June 2007.**

**This book is dedicated to his memory. ...a Common kid sadly missed.**

**Rest in peace Brian.**

# *Candinna (Candy) Tracey McFarlane (nee Smith) 2007*

*Candy Smith*

I was born in 1971 (one of the last of the flower children!!) in Woolwich at The British Mothers and Babies Hospital on a hot summers evening. I grew up an only child and lived at various addresses throughout the Plumstead area starting with 70A Griffin Road until I was about two years old I think. We then moved to 6 St Margaret's Grove. Wow, did that place have such a huge garden, or so I thought when I was small. Big enough for my swing anyway...that's where my memories begin. I used to play with the girl upstairs from me, usually on the Common opposite, or we would sometimes escape through the hole in the fence at the bottom of our shared garden to play on the swings at the back, next to the flats. I remember long summers, hazy days, mud pies, Knock Down Ginger, chopper bike rides with the boy at the bottom of the road, eating cooking apples from my garden that used to make me feel sick, dressing up in my mum's clothes and smearing all her make up across my face (sorry mum!!), camping trips in the orchards of Kent, firework night with the jumping jacks and rockets and of course the seven foot guy that my mum, dad and I used to take a week to make. Then up to Bexleyheath Station for 'penny for the guy'. Oh yes, and how could I possibly forget... sledge rides on the common and my very first kiss in 'our den' with the boy from the pub at the top of the road!!!

Then it was onto 36 Church Manorway, Abbeywood (although really classed as Plumstead as it was just off of the High Street and Wickham Lane). It was a lovely little bungalow, detached and with lattice light windows. It's changed so much now. Anyway, I remember building an igloo one winter with my mum, in the back garden out of ice. It was so cold. In the summer I used to create my own little assault course, which was always fun if not a bit on the dangerous side really. Oh, and I was in the Girls Brigade up at the Evangelical Church on the Common and Sunday School at St Nicholas Church. I lived at Church Manorway until I was sixteen years old, when finally we moved to 228b Lakedale Road.

By this time I had joined the Army Cadets, 108 Signals of Watling Street, Bexleyheath and was really enjoying having plenty of adventures, which would later create some of the best and fondest memories of my growing up.

Other memories...the old playgrounds, the umbrella (or witch's hat), the horse (the one that if you sat at the front and went hell for leather and if you didn't time it right, it would knock your teeth out, or, sitting at the back you would be flung off) and of course the slides, swings and see-saw. Bring back our old rides!!! They were fun, even though there was risk involved. Climbing trees... yes, I was a bit of a tomboy. I certainly had my moments!! Woolwich Ferry and trips to Southend on Sea, Hastings and Ramsgate and our family holidays... special times.

My schools... South Rise, Plumcroft, Timbercroft, Greenwich Park, Welling Central and finally Plumstead Manor.

My nan.. oh my nan, \*Hilda Dartnall. She lived at 85 Flaxton Road. (She was there from 1954) She used to ride on her motorbike and was park keeper at Swingate Lane playing fields for many years. Does anyone remember her? She was a very independent and forthright lady, never was shy in giving her opinion, but a very kind woman who would help anyone in need. She worked at the Arsenal in the war years and was a dispatch rider.

I now live in Scotland... up in the Highlands and have done now for four and a half years. (2007) I am a mum myself now, bringing up my son who is eleven years old.

I miss Plumstead. I miss the 'old' Plumstead, the one of yesteryear. The one of my childhood, where time seemed to last forever. It was a blissful time of innocence, freedom, laughter, morals, love and yes, happiness. I visit Plumstead usually a couple of times a year and it saddens me to see how much it has changed. 'Progress they call it. Nah... Nothing that changes that much can ever be called 'progress'. I will always have a very special place in my heart for my 'home' and no matter where I go or how much it changes; my memories will always stay the same.

Just what I wouldn't give to have the chance for one last time, to go back to one day in my childhood and experience again those glorious days!!

- *Nan's full name was Hilda Mary Major-Dartnall.*



# Captain David Page Woolwich Ferry Skipper

*Lynda Sturrock, David Page's daughter recalls, via Mrs Rosina Venn  
(nee Bowden) niece*

David Charles Page, born 05/01/1916, died 15/12/1992.

When David started his career on the Woolwich Ferry he worked for a private company, which was attached to the Woolwich Ferry. He was always known by his second name.

His job was a Rope Maker, which meant he had to splice the rope ends so round rings could be attached to the rope, which then could go over hooks.

David then became an apprentice on the barges, until the man he worked for died. (My cousin believed he died as a result of falling between two barges)

During WWII David was in the Merchant Navy and returned to the Woolwich Ferry when the war ended. The ferryboats at that time were the older style paddleboats, which, much later, were changed to the present newer version of diesel vessels, built in 1963.

David told his family that some passengers were more trouble than they're worth. Saying that after the war years there was a spat of people who tried to commit suicide. They'd often do this by waiting until the ferry was in mid-stream before jumping overboard. The crewmembers had an awful time trying to rescue them. They would try rescuing them by hooking their clothing with a boat hook, but, on a few occasions, some crewmen had to jump into the murky cold Thames water in order to rescue them. David said that sadly for some folk though, when the crew were unsuccessful in their attempts and the strong suction pulled them under, they drowned. (See the newspaper cuttings featured below)



*First Mate David Page, centre, and Deckhand Clive Brickleman, receiving their award for rescuing a drowning man.*

*Below, is the newspaper article.*

## AWARD FOR FIRST MATE

**T**HE first mate on the Woolwich Ferry-boat Will Crooks, has received an award in recognition of his part in a Thames rescue last summer.

He is Mr. David Charles Page, of 41, Kidbrooke-lane, Eltham, and he went to Woolwich Police Station last Friday to receive a Royal Humane Society Resuscitation Certificate.

In July last year Mr. Page was aboard the Will Crooks when the cry "Man overboard" went up.

Mr. Page, aged 45, and deck-hand Mr. Clive Bricklebank, of Abbey Wood, went to the side of the ferry-boat and saw a man in the river.

A life-belt was thrown, and Mr. Page stripped off his jacket and prepared to dive in. However, the ferry-boat edged closer to the man, and he and Mr. Bricklebank managed to lodge a boathook in his clothing,

and haul him aboard.

Mr. Page and Mr. Bricklebank carried out artificial respiration until ambulance men arrived and took over from them. Mr. Bricklebank also received a R.H.S. Certificate.

Taken to St. Nicholas Hospital, Plumstead, the rescued man subsequently made a full recovery.

### PREVIOUS RESCUE

Mr. Page recalled on Friday how three weeks before the rescue in July, another rescue had been made from the ferry.

"It was about 7.45 and getting dark," he said: "There was a Dutch boat moored at North Woolwich Buoys, and three of her crew were going ashore in a fibre glass dinghy.

"The dinghy tipped over, and we picked up the three men and took them back to their ship," said Mr. Page.

The awards were presented by Chief Inspector J. McAndrew.

Lynda, David's daughter, also recalls when her cousin and her were taken up into the Wheel House (Bridge) and shown around it. We then went down into the crew's quarters, which smelt like a mixture of sour milk and cigarettes.

The members of the ferry started up their own newsletter, which often contained funny stories. One of these stories David retold to his family was when he was up in the Wheel House and, looking down, he could see a deck hand bent over double, then leaning to one side and then falling over. David thought the deck hand had been taking ill and so he rushed down to him. "Are you alright mate?" asked David, to which the crewman replied, "No, my wife has stitched my pockets up with my handkerchief hanging out and I'm trying to wipe my nose!"

David worked his way up through the ranks, from a deck hand to Captain. He finally went on to become the Commander of all the boats until he retired in 1981.



*Captain David Page pictured after 27 years working on the Woolwich Ferry.*

In June the 30th 1969 his wages were 30 pounds 15/- and 9d per week, rising by one increment of 10s to 31 pounds 5/- and ninepence.

Rosina Venn (nee Bowden) who supplied the story and newspaper articles says, "I was born in November 1944. I attended Timbercroft School. I later attended Waverley Road School, where Dr Holmes was the Headmistress. My own children along with my very young brother also attended Timbercroft School. They said it was the first time in the school's history they had an Uncle, Nieces and Nephew attending the school all at the same time.



*Woolwich Ferry 1970.*

**DAVID** Page is everybody's idea of a ship's captain, as he stands on the bridge, steady blue eyes on the horizon, looking a little like David Niven with his narrow moustache and immaculate uniform.

He is responsible for guiding his ship some 18,000 miles in a year and for the safe arrival of millions of tons of cargo, and thousands of passengers.

But the longest trip that Captain Page ever makes is half a mile, and takes about four minutes.

Captain Page works for the Woolwich Free Ferry.

On any day he may be master of one of the three ferries that cross the river two at a time between Woolwich and the Essex shore.

The ferries cross six times an hour, 365 days a year, carrying an astonishing number of vehicles, from giant articulated trailers to the family saloon.

traffic waiting to load. "We're the part of the road that floats," joked First Officer Wray, who lives at Charlton, "the ferry is the link between the North Circular and the South Circular."

One of the ferries, the James Newman, is named after the man who called the Thames "liquid history", and Captain Page is very aware of the historical connections of the river.

"You can't help knowing what went on in the past, as well as what's happening now," he said.

The three 738 ton diesel engined ferry boats The Ernest Bevin, John Burns and James Newman were built in 1963. They are the modern version of a ferry that has been in existence from at least the early 1300's.

by  
**Maureen  
Kirby**

The present Free Ferry was opened in 1889, by Lord Roseberry, who declared it "open and free forever."

Up to the arrival of the new ferries in 1963 the boats were side loading paddle steamers.

On the wet, grey day when we went down to the Thames, Captain Page was on board the

"Just down river there the prison ships were moored . . . and it was from Woolwich that the ships taking prisoners to the colonies left."

Fred Wray added: "Today we know most things that happen on the river.

"You don't see the red sails any more. Once you would see fifteen or more Thames barges at one time tacking back and forth, but not now."

We left the Ernest Bevin as she started on her fifty-fourth voyage of the day.

Ernest Bevin, as she and the James Newman crossed and recrossed the narrow but hazardous river.

Down below in the officer's mess we drank cups of steaming hot tea with Chief Engineer, Paul Jurrowski, and First Officer Fred Wray.

Like the other men who work on the ferries they've spent their lives on the water, on tugs, sludge vessels and ferries.

"Most of us are Freeman of the river. We've served out time as watermen or lightermen," explained Fred Wray.

Paul Jorrowski loves the life. Working on the ferries also mean he can get home every night to Abbey Wood, something that most sea-faring men can't do.

We watched the line of



M01825

London County Council

Conway Road I.C.C. Boys' School,  
Lakedale Road,  
Plumstead, S.E.18

Ref. \_\_\_\_\_

20 Dec 1929.

David Charles Page has been a scholar here for some years + is now in the Seventh Standard. He is a good boy, of average ability + has always proved to be a willing + obliging boy. He has always tried to do his best at school + his general behaviour is very good + he is honest + trustworthy. I can recommend him, confidently, for employment.

W. Allen  
(Headmaster)

David Page's school report, Conway Boys' Dec 1929.

## Ferry in danger after ships collide

QUICK action by ship's mate David Page prevented a serious accident on the Thames during the Friday evening rush hour when two vessels collided and threatened to run down a packed car ferry at North Woolwich pier.

Mr. Page alerted the crew, whipped up the gangways and cast off from the North pier as the 485 ton London coaster *Walstream*, bore down on ferry boat *James Newman*, after colliding with the 1,425 ton *Stella*.

The 880 ton free ferry was unharmed. More than 200 passengers watched the manoeuvre, as a thick mist gathered.

Said Captain Norton, from his superintendent's office at the Albert Dock: "It was a fine piece of seamanship—but our men are trained to take it in their stride.

"Mr. Page saw the danger and cast off at top speed, moving away at eight knots."

*James Newman* and *John Burns* were launched during 1963 to replace old paddle boats which had served the river ferry driven by coke fires for more than 30 years. They were delivered with sister ship *Ernest Bevin* as part of an £804,000 contract and launched at Dundee.

Newspaper item. Year?



Woolwich Ferry *James Newman*

# *Case Histories Of Waifs And Strays*

## *Actual part extracts of their case histories*

Some sad examples that tells, in part, of how it was for these unfortunate children.

Here below are the part case histories of two young sisters, known only as 'A' and 'M', that had a brief stay in the Plumstead Workhouse.

Case 942

**Case number:** 942  
**Application year:** 1887  
**Name:** M  
**Gender:** Female  
**Year of birth:** 1879  
**Home:** Olive House Home For Girls, Hemel Hempstead

**Description:** This case file relates to two sisters, A. and M. Their mother had died of consumption in March 1884. They lived in one room in a house in Woolwich with their 12-year-old-brother and their father who was an "indigent and worthless man" and who was co-habiting with a single woman. The house was being used as a brothel: two married women, whose husbands were abroad, were living there and working as prostitutes. The children earned a few pence by waiting on the prostitutes and running errands for them. They had also worked in this way for prostitutes who lived in an adjoining house. The children had hardly any clothing and were in a wretched condition. The night before the application was made the woman with whom the father was co-habiting had given birth to a child. The children were the subjects of orders made at Woolwich Police Court sending them to the Certified Industrial School at Hemel Hempstead. They were admitted to the Home on 10 March 1887.

In August 1890 the Revd Rudolf wrote requesting that A. be transferred immediately to St Chad's Home for Girls, Far Headingley. This did not happen. On 12 August 1890 A. was transferred to a Marylebone Home, possibly in Blandford Square. It is not clear whether this was one of the Society's Homes: it seems likely that it was not. She went to a situation in Dover with children from the Home. A letter from Hemel Hempstead written on 8 September [1890] records that A. had left her situation and

was thought to have gone to her sister in Woolwich. It was hoped to persuade her to go into service in a good house otherwise her future was uncertain and the writer of the letter felt that "if we lose her now we lose her altogether". On 16 September A. was at back in Blandford Square, Marylebone with a Miss Lee who was going to get her a situation. A. is next heard of in June 1894. She was in a Female Mission in Greenwich, pregnant and destitute. She did not know the father of the baby and "her friends were bad". The Committee of the Mission had decided that she must go into the Workhouse, but before this happened it was decided to ask the Waifs and Strays' Society if they could help in any way. The woman who had been living with A's father had just gone into the Workhouse with her children as A's father had left them and it was not thought desirable for A. to be with them. If A. went to the Workhouse it might be the "ruin of her" but she needed financial help for any other course of action. No Home would take a pregnant girl without payment. There is no record of the Society's reply on the file.

M. remained at the Hemel Hempstead Home until she went into service in Harrow on 31 March 1894. On 27 April 1895 she was readmitted to the Home and from subsequent correspondence it appears that she stole money from her employer. There was a dispute lasting some months about the exact amount that was taken, the employer claiming that it was a much greater sum than the girl would admit to. M. was sent out to another situation in Hemel Hempstead on 23 May 1895. In late 1895 M. came back to the Home because she was ill. She was treated in the West Herts Infirmary for a gastric ulcer and it was proposed to send her to a convalescent home at St Leonards on Sea for a change of air. Her employer was concerned about her and was willing to have her back. On 7 March 1896 M. was sent to a farm in Hemel Hempstead but she was removed in April as it was too rough and she had difficulty in getting to church. It was decided to send her to Bayswater to be a housemaid. On 10 August 1896 M. returned to the Hemel Hempstead Home. There is an undated [1896?] newspaper clipping in the file concerning M's employer who was sentenced to hard labour for acts of gross indecency. He had been convicted in September 1894 for indecently assaulting a young servant girl but had been released from his term of imprisonment by the Home Secretary, apparently in consequence of ill health.

The younger sister of A was referred to as M. She was eight years old on the 30<sup>th</sup> August 1887..

Case 942

Application to Waifs and Strays' Society for A. 22 February 1887.

1. Give the child's Christian name and surname.

**A**

2. State the exact age, and give the date and place of birth.

**13 next May, Born at Chatham 14th May 1872**

3. Legitimate?

**Yes**

4. If baptized, state place and date of baptism.

5. Parents living?

**Father Living**

6. If, however, either or both are dead, state of what disease they died, and give the date of their death

**Mother to [consumption] 12 March / 84**

7. If living, give their exact places of abode, and state how long they have resided there.

**Father Living at 2 Mary Ann Cottages Back Lane Woolwich**

**since 14th Aug**

8. Give the Christian names and surnames of his parents (in full) and state their ages.

**Father G 43 Next August**

9. What was or is the nature of the father's occupation and the amount of his weekly earnings? Give the name and address of his present or last employer.

**At Present No occupation**

**In Williams Union House, Chatham**

10. What was or is the nature of the mother's occupation and the amount of her weekly earnings? Give the name and address of her present or last employer.

11. Have the parents or guardians ever received parish relief? If so, to what extent?

**No**

12. Give the names, addresses, ages, occupations and earnings (if any) of all the brothers and sisters of the child

**NAME, ADDRESS, AGE, OCCUPATION, WEEKLY EARNINGS**

**R, Wilmington St Woolwich, 18. In service 4s**

**S, Mary Ann Cottages Back Lane, 12, at school**

13. At what address and with whom is the child now living?

**Mary Ann Cottages, Back Lane, Woolwich,**

**Living with the father**

14. Give in full the names, addresses, ages, occupations and earnings of each living relative the child is

*known to possess either on the father's or mother's side such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, &c.*

DEGREE OF RELATIONSHIP, NAMES, ADDRESS, AGE, OCCUPATION, WEEKLY EARNINGS

**None**

15. *State whether any of the child's relatives are in your judgment in a position to maintain the child, or to contribute in any degree to its support.*

**Relatives not known**

16. *Can any payment for the child be guaranteed from any source?*

**None**

17. *Has the child ever been convicted? Is so, state the nature of his offence and term of imprisonment*

**No**

18. *Has it ever attended day school? If so, where and for how long?*

19. *Ever attended Sunday School? Is so, where and for how long?*

20. *Has the child ever been in the workhouse? If so, for how long and where?*

**The Plumstead Workhouse five weeks**

21. *Has the child any affections of the limbs, joints, skin or eyes which may have the affect of preventing him from entering domestic services?*

22. *Is the child subject to fits? or has ie ever had one? If so, state its nature. Is this child subject to incontinence of urine?*

23. *Is the child at present affected with any infectious or contagious disease, or with scrofula requiring medical treatment?*

24. *Has the child had scarlet fever, or whooping cough or measles, or small pox? If not the latter, has it been vaccinated?*

25. *Is the child's general health good?*

**Copy of Medical Certificate attached - I hereby certify that I have this day examined A & M & they are in a good state of health**

**Woolwich**

**Feb.23.87.**

**W. M.D.**

26. *Are the child's parents, grandparents or next of kin, willing to sign an agreement to commit it wholly to the care of the Managers of the Home, to obey the rules in force, and to permit the said child when fully trained to be sent to any situation in the United Kingdom, which may be obtained for it by the Managers?*

**Yes**

*I certify that the foregoing questions have been correctly replied to, to the best of my belief.*

**Name S**

**Address The Rectory, Woolwich**

**Incumbent of Woolwich**

**Date 22 February 1889**

The lawful mother of these children is dead. The father is an indigent and worthless man cohabiting with a single woman. Two married women reside in the house whose husbands are abroad and who are now living as prostitutes, receiving men in the house. The children earn pence by waiting on them and running errands for them. There have been prostitutes in the adjoining house and the children have been waiting on them. The children are almost nude and are in a wretched condition. The woman with whom the father is cohabiting was confined last night. The whole family resides in one room.

Signed (Revd) S.

The Rectory

Woolwich

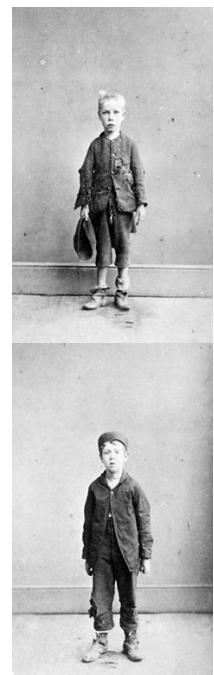
Below are some typical photos of the Waifs & Strays children pre admission to The Waifs and Strays Society.



*Two brothers admitted c.1890.*



*Brother & sister admitted c.1890.*





Refer to [www.victorianlondon.org](http://www.victorianlondon.org) for this and other fascinating facts and pictures.

*Hidden Lives Revealed A Virtual Archive - Children in Care - 1881 -1918* © The Children's Society.



# *Cemeteries Bomb Damaged During WW2.*

## *Short extracts from stories*

*Extract From, 'Stories from Welling' by Peter John Caplin*

I remember going to Wickham Lane during the War. As you went down the Lane there was a huge cemetery that had steps going down. It was a really big cemetery. Well, one day, a landmine hit it. As I walked by I can remember seeing all these skeletons and coffins lying all over the place, because the landmine blew up the whole cemetery.

*Extract from, 'My Wartime Childhood' by Peter Beaumont*

One memory I have is of the graveyard at St Nicholas Church at Plumstead, receiving a direct hit from a V2 rocket one night. I was indoors being washed by my mum at the time but was quickly pushed under the table by her when the explosion sounded. The next day we went to look at the damage and inside the church there was a big crack along a large tomb and the big kids had broken into the coffin — when we went to play one of my friends removed the skull from the coffin and we started to throw it to each other. We used to fight with the bones and sword fight with them — it sounds horrible now but it was what we did as kids! We use to make camps in the graveyard and dare the girls to walk through at night.

*Extract from, 'A South East Londoner's Story' by Henry R.J. Pilott*

One large bomb, which fell in Church Manorway, uncovered many graves in St Nicholas' Churchyard and scattered bones all over the place!

*WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at [bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](http://bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar)*



# *Civilian Casualties*

*Author unknown*

I lived in Plumstead, London, and we were within less than two miles of the Royal Arsenal, making armaments; the Optical Factory, making bomb and gun sights; the main barracks of the Cavalry; and the AJS factory, making motor bikes for the army. So we were bombed night after night.

Over a hundred bombs landed in our street and everyone in the street above us were killed. Later a 'V1' landed on the C & A store, killing around 60 women, queuing for pots and pans.

*'WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at [bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](http://bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar)*



# *Clean Lake, Dirty Lake*

*Colin Weightman*

... always a Common kid.

A story about our very own Lake Districts.

The dreaded pipe that fed out into the Ravine Pond.

As Common kids we would often disappear into the dark recesses of this fascinating underground netherworld of trickling water, an echoing cavernous kingdom that just beckoned Common kids into its inviting wide mouth, to explore...but not by yourself...always with a mate; in fact, the more the better. This collective courage enabled us to waddle the full distance up into the pipe's considerable length. An iron grill barred us adventurous kids from exploring further into its depths. Which was just as well. We would still be travelling that pipe if it were not for that grill preventing us kids venturing any further. With the sounds of water gushing mysteriously down into other inviting junctions of yet more pipes, and a bunch of wondrous Common kids, encouraging each other, yes, it was indeed a good thing there was a very strong barred grill situated there.



"Y'ever had a barf, Billy"

"Yes, I once fell in the Serpentine."

There were many large spiders that lived in this dark concrete cave and you tried to keep your head down as you waddled along so as to prevent your hair brushing the cobwebs above and collecting a large spider hitching a ride on you! I was very interested in the large brown moths that also lived in the dark recesses of the pipe. They hung in the crevices between where the pipes were joined together, along with the spiders. Being nocturnal, they would hang around in the pipe's dark recesses during the day, flying out at night. They were a very large moth and had a black hard shell-like covering on their back. I wonder if they were a small species of bat? Nah, I doubt it.

This pipe fed out into the ravine pond. We called this pond the "Dirty Lake".



*Ravine Pond c2004.*

*Photo Alan Gibbs.*

In those days it was a smelly, muddy pond. It had an iron railing fence that surrounded it. To get into the lake you had to climb over this railing. Once in the lake area you could walk around and through the trees and shrubs that grew all around the lake.

The lake was in two sections with an island at its centre. You could get onto the island by balancing along the dividing concrete partition that divided the lake.

This was where many a Common kid had his extra bath for the week!

You were never a Common kid unless you were baptised in the dirty lake. And what a baptism! Water was never a Common kids favourite element. At least, not to actually get flipping immersed in the 'orrible stuff! To play around it, sure. To paddle in it, sure. To catch frogs, king newts and sticklebacks out of, sure. But to get fully into the stuff: no way! But there wasn't a Common kid that didn't fall into the 'orrible, stinking, smelly, dark and very cold waters of the dirty lake. It was a magnet that attracted us kids. It eventually got you. You either slipped, fell, or were 'accidentally' pushed; it always got you in the end. In fact, more than once did I find myself floundering in its stinking muddy waters and having to trudge home, sloshing and dripping, cold and saturated, to a telling off, clip round the ear and then a warm change of clothes and a hot cup of cha.

The other 'Lake' was the 'clean lake'. This lake was the paddling pool. The paddling pool was a shallow, blue painted pool that us Common kids enjoyed our very first under water dives in. Being at least around about a whole 12 inches deep, on a good day, this was quite adventurous and very exciting for a tiny 24-inch Common kid to sit in, to splash in and, with much fear, and gathering much courage, to actually put your head right into and underneath its clear, chlorinated-smelling, waters.



*Paddling Pool, Winn's Common, c1949. From left, Colin, Arthur (Collins) brother's John & Mark, Brian (Collins) My sister Ann is in pushchair.*

On a hot summer's day it was a great trip out with your bigger brothers, to splash, run and swim, and just sit in, and even to watch it change colour around you, to a cloudy yellow colour! .. in this great expanse of water, our paddling pool.

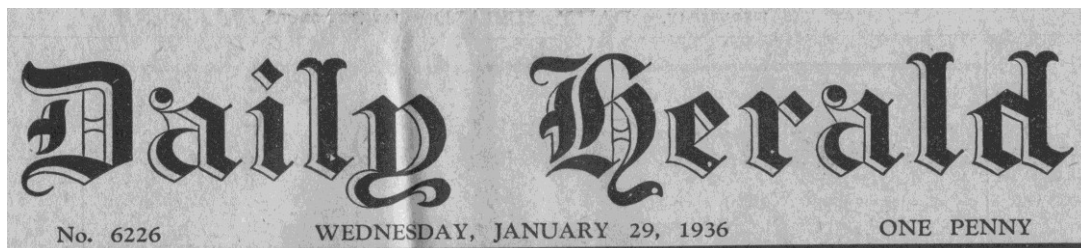
Parents could sit and watch or have a picnic and chat with a cuppa, a bit of fruitcake or a sticky bun next to the pool. We would get dried and dressed in the open changing shed, feeling rather embarrassed at the rather public display of our bits and pieces!



Another good use of the 'clean lake' was to sail your model yacht on it. Especially on a windy day, when it cut through the choppy water at great speed. I would set the angle of the little metal rudder on its stern and send it on a great arching sail through the crashing waves. It would lean right over, its white sails nearly swamped, but its heavy metal keel would hold it up against the strong wind. Such were the simple adventures of us wee Common kids, enjoying our very own special 'Lake Districts'.



*Paddling Pool, Winn's Common.c1949. Left, Brother John, Colin (centre)  
Right, Brother Mark, in centre front is Arthur Collins.*



*Old Style newspaper heading. 1936.*

# *Colin Beckford Remembers*

*Colin Beckford*

I was born in 1943 and attended Conway Road from 1948-1954. From there I went to Wickham Lane (Whack'em College).

I lived at 29 Glenside Road, Plumstead, until I married in 1963. My wife's name is Lillian Osborne, known affectionately as Josie, who lived round the corner at No.4 Marmadon Road. Josie was the only girl in her family. She had five brothers, John, Derek, David, Ronald and Raymond. Her parents were Lillian and Jack. They worked in the Matchless motorcycle factory.

I started courting Josie when she was aged 13, although we must have played together as children! We were married in 1963, and are still very happy together.

Some other names of children who lived in Glenside Road I can remember were; The Bartholomew's (Barts), Mickey Daws, Roger Dowset, Arthur Chapel (A.K.A. 'Arfa-apple) Jill, Joan and Jimmy Salter and Pearl Denahay.

My earliest recollections of Conway Road School were in 1948, when I was five years old. The thing I remember most was the enforced rest time in the afternoons. The assembly hall was turned into a giant nursery filled with folding camp beds, and we were made to lie still, even if we weren't the least bit tired. Then there was the teaspoon of malt, which I thought was the tastiest thing in the world, and of course the small bottle of milk and straw. I tried some malt recently, and it was revolting!

When I was six I suffered from tonsillitis and was admitted to St Nicholas' Hospital for an operation.

When I returned to school I remember my teacher asking the class a question. She asked, "Hands up all those who don't receive any pocket money."

I put my hand up, simply because I wasn't sure what 'pocket money' was.

She glared at me, at the same time asking, in a very loud voice, "What is your hand doing in the air, Colin?"

"I don't know, Miss"

"Don't you receive any pocket money at all?"

"No, Miss."

She raised her voice a bit higher. "Do you remember me visiting you in hospital?"

"Yes Miss"

"Did I give you a three-penny bit to buy some sweets?"

"Yes Miss."

"You put that three-penny bit in your pocket, didn't you?" I grunted.

"That, Colin Beckford, was pocket money. Now go and stand outside until you are ready to tell the class that you are a liar, and a tiresome boy."

That was the first of many punishments I received at school. They ranged from writing lines, getting whacked with the plimsoll from the P.T. teacher, to getting the cane on the backside, or on the hands: all were probably well deserved.

Other, more pleasant memories, from that time were, playing marbles, or fag-cards, in the playground, playing on Plumstead Common, at the top of Lakedale Road, rolling dried leaves in any old paper and smoking them, (or trying to) collecting dog-ends from the gutter and smoking them (with better results than the dry leaves).

Empire Day was when we dressed in our Cubs uniform, complete with sheath knife and proudly paraded round the school playground.

I remember buying fireworks and having friendly fights with my best mate, Mickey Daws. The idea was to stand facing each other, on opposite sides of the road, and aim Roman candles at each other. It amazes me that we were never hurt. Another 'game' was standing on a penny banger as it exploded; it didn't half make my foot numb!

I'm thankful political correctness wasn't even thought of then; it would have spoilt all the fun.

A final memory, how many red-blooded, under elevens, remember the adorable, Miss Weeks. Wow!!!



*Colin Beckford aged nine, Conway School.*

# *Collins Family In Plumstead*

*Mike Collins*

Although sadly no longer alive, my dad and his family had quite a history in the Plumstead area going back some considerable time. Being quite interested in family history, I've also managed over the past few years to piece together the Collins family and its association with Plumstead, which I hope, will be of some interest.

Let's begin with my great, great grandfather John Collins who moved from Gloucestershire around the mid 1800's to live and work in the Plumstead area. Like many thousands of others at that time he found work at the Woolwich Arsenal as a labourer. It is not clear exactly when or why he moved from his village home in the English countryside but during the early 1850's migration from the country to cities was still very common and around that time the Arsenal was increasing production to keep the British troops in the Russian Crimea supplied with necessary firepower. So perhaps that was the connection. Sometime following his move and at the age of 21 he married a local girl from Deptford (Ann Rood) and they settled in rooms in the Spray Buildings (presumably now Spray Street), Plumstead. John then raised six children and continued working at the Arsenal for over 40 years. He was finally promoted to 'Foreman Labourer' some time prior to his retirement just before the end of the century.(19<sup>th</sup>) The family had a number of lodgers during their time in the Spray Buildings and for thirty odd years one of the lodgers was John's bachelor brother Joseph from Gloucestershire. I had a cousin stay for a month once and by the end of it my dear wife was becoming somewhat 'tetchy', let's say. So, all I can say is that great, great grandmother Ann must have been a saint!



John's eldest son John Henry Collins was known to have been working at the Arsenal as a 'Cartridge Bag Machinist' during the early 1900's; he lived with his family in Abery Street.

However, second son George Collins (my great grandfather pictured in above photo), had different ideas. In 1882 at the age of 22 George married Emma Richardson from Woolwich and by the following year he was running, (and possibly the owner of) a cheese shop on Woolwich High Street. Although showing promise at this stage George certainly could not have been said to have 'made it'. James Thorne in his 'Environs of London' (1875) described the streets in and around the Woolwich High Street as being, "Narrow, irregular and lined with mean brick buildings and small shabby shops" In this area known as the 'Dusthole' lived some of Woolwich's poorest people—unemployed labourers, prostitutes and vagrants in boarding houses".

George must have stuck at it, as he later moved on to own shops and a restaurant in New Road just off Beresford Square. In addition there was also a shop in Plumstead, as

the 1902 Kelly's London Suburban Directory shows George Collins, Grocer and Provisions Retailer at 32b and 33 Plumstead Road, Plumstead. By this time it would appear that George's businesses were prospering, as he moved to a large detached residence in Bexleyheath. The house was called 'Yara' (56 Crook Log) which was on or near Bexleyheath Broadway. It was used as an ARP centre during the Second World War and later became derelict. A supermarket was later built on the spot where it stood.

George and Emma had five children: Gertrude, Violet, Eustace, Leonard and Douglas. There was also an adopted son Walter Wiseman. Gertrude married and emigrated to New Zealand. Violet married Victor Cray, who served with distinction as a sergeant in the Royal Horse Artillery and was awarded the Military Medal for gallantry in France in WW1.

Eustace went off to seek his fortune in the USA in 1907, returning in 1914 to sign up for 'King and Country'. Leonard died in infancy and Walter was killed in action in France during the War. His name appears on the war memorial at Charlton Village. Douglas served with honour as a 2nd Lieutenant in France, where he was wounded. Demobilised in 1919, he married and I understand he later became Borough Treasurer for Woolwich Borough Council.



*Eustace (my grandfather) as Deputy Sheriff.*

In his business heyday George Collins called himself the 'Peoples Caterer'. His grandson remembered having cutlery in his kitchen stamped with the letters P.C. George was also a high-ranking member of a local Masonic Lodge.

Prior to World War One there were business troubles, which resulted in the loss of the shops and restaurants and the house Yara. However, enough capital was retained to purchase a shop with living accommodation at Charlton Village where a grocery/off-licence business was established (29 The Village Charlton). George continued to run the shop until his death in 1920. In the late 1990's the shop was owned by 'Davison's Wine Merchants' (established 1875) and is still run as an off-licence.

In his later years although only 5'4" tall George had a 60" waist. He was a heavy drinker and because of his obesity, wife Emma was obliged to put on his shoes and socks each day. George died on 3rd August 1920. He was 60 years old.

At this point my grandfather (Eustace) took over the family shop in Charlton. However, sometime between 1930 and 1933 a Co-operative store opened in the village and as a result the shop, along with a number of others, ceased trading. (Who said this was a modern problem?) Eustace finally obtained employment with the Woolwich Electricity Board, first as a labourer and later as a storeman. (If it was good enough for his grandfather...)

At this stage the Collins family breaks its ties with the Plumstead area. My Dad (John Collins) was born in Charlton but joined the army at 14 as a boy soldier and served a full 22 years around the world. He never returned to the Plumstead area again to live. I was

brought up as an Army kid, (and loved every minute) living in Germany and Singapore. My parents finally settled in South Wales and I now live happily married in Scotland. (Although I did live in West London for twelve happy 'single' years).

**An additional footnote to the story.**

Employed by his father George Collins until May 11th 1907 when he travelled by sea as a fare-paying passenger on the USS Philadelphia from Southampton to New York with a friend Ernie Dickman. The ship's manifest shows Eustace as 19 years of age (he was actually 18 at the time), from Woolwich, with the occupation of 'barman'. The destination of his journey is indicated as 'midway B. Columbia'. He is described as 5' 3" tall with a dark complexion, dark brown hair and eyes. He is identified as being in possession of £5 (or possibly \$5). Friend Ernie (Ernest Dickman) is 21 years old and a soldier from Bexleyheath. Also shown as 'midway B.C.' but in addition, on route to 'Friends Clark's Ranch'. Both travellers are processed on Ellis Island New York on arrival on May 18th. An 'over write' on the ships manifest shows them to be 'in transit'.

Eustace is subsequently believed to have worked as a gold miner, a fur trapper and lumberjack in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. In later years he would speak to his sons of such places as Seattle, Portland and the Blue Mountains of Vancouver. As a one time Deputy Sheriff in the town of Seattle, he was shot through the left forearm while trying to apprehend a drunk who, mounted on a horse, was shooting out street lamps in the town centre.

So that's my family's story about Plumstead. I've been to the area on a number of occasions to have a walk around and take a few photographs and I must say I liked it. I've always been a bit of a 'townie' at heart and I felt very 'at home'. During my visits I wondered if I may have ever 'brushed shoulders' with a distant relative.

*(September 2000)*



# *Contented Christmas Memories Of A Young Boy*

*Colin Weightman*

*Growing up in the late 1940s and early 1950s.*

Of...

Saving my 6d pocket money for buying Christmas presents, instead of the usual weekly indulging myself buying sweets from the corner shop, and actually feeling very excited about what I was going to buy with my sparse stash of saved up pocket money.

Of...

Excitedly making paper chains in our classroom at school. Cutting different coloured sheets of paper into strips and gluing them into interlocking circles, forming them into ever growing coloured paper chains. Remembering the sheer pleasure of seeing these paper chains being hung up, transforming our drab classrooms into multi coloured fairy grottos, and all this achieved by our own wonderful handiwork.

Of...

Mum, busy as ever, shopping, struggling happily up that hill each day with bulging shopping bags, and me, a little fella, giving mum a hand by holding on to a shopping bag handle and sharing its heavy weight, well I thought I was helping mum. Bringing home the extra large chicken and the huge turkey, the large pre-ordered cooked ham, along with the oranges, tangerines, Brussels sprouts and other veggies for the Christmas feast. All paid for by mum's Co-op Christmas savings and her Divi payments! The fresh peas, to be shelled by us kids sitting out in the back garden, bundled in scarves and jackets to stay warm, happily popping the pods and spilling the peas into a large saucepan that we sat around; at least those peas that survived from popping into our mouths first!

Of...

Wonderful smells wafting enticingly from the oven-warmed scullery at all hours of the day and night, along with busy, busy sounds of mixing, stirring and whipping of ingredients in large china mixing bowls. Sultanas, currants, glazed cherries, spices, and sticky coloured fruit peels, "...can I have some, mum?" Fruity smells of jellies melting in



*Colin, aged five, with younger sister Ann, aged two, in back garden, Sladedale Road, c1949.*

moulds of hot water, flour covered table tops, cake tins lined with margarine wrapping paper, half full of soft cake mix ready for the hot oven. Wooden mixing spoons covered in delicious sweet tasting sticky cake mix..."Yes, you can lick the spoon"...Ah, sheer luxury! Bottles of cream from the milkman, and watching him quickly sip his hot cuppa, as he chats to mum on the front porch, telling tales of how very busy he is, what with the extra work load of so many Christmas orders.

Of...

Plumstead High Street and Lakedale Road shop windows all lit up and overflowing with glitter and tinsel, sparkling Christmas gifts, and special Yule-tide goodies. The Department stores in Woolwich bulging with the wonderful sights, sounds, and smells, of Christmas. Clear glass jars full of different coloured bath salts, and exotic bubble baths, available in neatly wrapped cubes or fancy shaped bottles. Pastel coloured soaps, scents and perfumes from afar, in strange geometric shaped bottles, everything tied in fancy ribbon bows and a myriad of other colourful smelly things. Brightly coloured toys, to look and wonder at, but alas never to be owned, except in a dream. Christmas carols filling the air, as large fancy brass tills are rung. The compressed air filled tubes shoot encapsulated receipts and money back and forth overhead, as gifts and goods are purchased.

Of...

The wintry trek across Winn's Common, to the silence of Bowman's Hollow, to hunt for some prickly holly branches, with the best display of red berries. Further expeditions were to the small valleys in Bostall Woods, to find the best and largest prickly cases that lay strewn under the heavily laden sweet chestnut trees. Stomping on the prickly cases to extract the shinny brown sweet chestnuts to be roasted in the fire embers on Christmas night.

Of...

Wrapping up warm and going out into the dark night air with your mates, to trudge around the hilly streets Carol Singing. Minding to not kick the empty milk bottles, as we boldly gathered in a stranger's porch. Then nervously knocking on the door. On hearing a movement from inside the home, we'd start to sing "While shepherds watched their flocks by night" all the while resisting a very real urge to sing, "When shepherds washed their socks by night all seated round the tub, a bar of Sunlight soap came down and we began to scrub!" Then, when the door opened, and our small smiling faces were greeted by those of older years, we'd change to the most angelic version of "Silent Night" that was ever heard. Then, later, counting up the many coppers, thru'penny pieces, sixpences, or with luck, even a shilling or two, and dividing it up equally, all to be added towards our other monies saved for presents.

Of...

Going shopping to choose and buy Christmas presents, and the l-o-n-g and careful consideration of price and value of the item. A packet of hairgrips for Sally next door, a flannel and a bar of fancy smelling coloured soap for my sister, a comb for my brother, handkerchiefs for dad, a box of lavender bath cubes and a comb for mum... Buying Christmas gift wrap paper and coloured labels and wrapping up the presents, when no one was allowed to look and see what was being wrapped up, or else...!

Of...

On Christmas Eve a very young five year old boy writing his secret message in large infant scrawled writing on a piece of paper. My most desired requests would then be carefully placed up the chimney of my bedroom's green tiled fireplace, carefully lodging the note in the cast iron damper situated in the chimney flue. Santa Claus surely could never miss this on his way down the chimney that very night. Of lying in bed, quietly talking to my younger three-year-old sister sharing our thoughts as excitement grew about receiving our wondrous presents on Christmas morning, so very near at long last, as our eyelids grew heavier, after such a very, very long day.

Of...

Christmas Day. Waking up and seeing the presents mysteriously, woderously and actually there, brightly wrapped, FOR ME at the end of the bed...Oh the shear excitement!

Of...

Christmas roast dinner with rich brown gravy, Christmas pudding, cream, warm mince pies. A bowl of next-door neighbour Sally's famous Christmas sherry and rum soaked trifle. Later, fancy wrapped toffees from a big round tin, seen only on this special day. The annual family gathering in our front room, only used on these special occasions and the treat of a Christmas variety show, from the accumulator battery valve wireless. A bright flickering coal fire and the smell of chestnuts roasting in the ashes under the fire grill. Everyone jumping then laughing as another chestnut explodes with a loud BANG! Breaking open the rock hard Brazil nuts and walnuts with the nutcrackers, and mixing them with the hazel nuts, peanuts, sultanas, wedges of tangerines, and Smiths crisps, untwisting the blue wax paper containing the salt shaking it well into the crisps. The bottle of port and sherry, only seen at Christmas, being poured out by dad. Cold meats for tea, with jelly and cream, Mackintoshes' lemonade or Tizer orangeade to follow, more warm mince tarts, and a really full belly..."More jelly and cream?"..."Oh yes please mum!"



Carol singer [to partner, whose efforts had not helped the performance]: "Wait till I get you 'ome, Emily. I won't 'alf give you Noel."

Of...

Playing outside in the road after Christmas dinner and sharing with your neighbourhood mates, chatting excitedly about what you'd received for Christmas and what they received and just how many goodies we'd all been eating. Then later on, back in doors, with our heavy tired eyes and bodies, We'd take our new toys to bed with us, after being allowed to stay up so very, very late... But then, after all, it was Christmas time!

Wondrous days for a child born a Common kid.



*Mother does know best...*

She chooses the IZAL toilet roll for three very sensible reasons — each sheet is treated with IZAL germicide, the roll lasts longer, and she knows that a fine *strong* tissue is a hygienic necessity.



*medicated  
smooth  
strong  
★ lasts longer*

# *Conway Primary School Remembered; 1949 – 1955*

*Colin Weightman*

I remember my very first day at school aged five. All the kids and their mums were standing around, waiting to be enrolled onto the register to start their very first day. Many of the kids started crying and were throwing tantrums when their mums finally left to go home, leaving them there on their own.

I was put into Miss Moy's class, who was the infants' teacher.

The classroom had folding canvas camp beds that we had to lie on during our mid-afternoon sleep. We were given our very own cloth bag that had small animal pictures sewn onto them, so we could identify them as our own. These hung on the wall by our coat hooks to keep our belongings in.

Later on, as older kids, I remember when we were dished out the cod-liver oil capsules and, after they were given out at two to each child, the playground was covered with golden brown capsules, spat out by some of us crafty kids: great to squash under your shoes.

I also remember the sad polio epidemic and the dreaded polio shots that we lined up for. We received them in our upper arm, which ached for ages afterwards. I recall Mr Bull, the Headmaster, a large and intimidating man, who always wore his trademark large blue and white spotted bow tie and a flower in



*Conway Primary School, c2000.  
Both Photos: Alan Gibbs.*



*Conway Infants, c1949. Colin is seated, front row, second from left. Note the lean of us kids 'cos the photo was taken on the sloping playground!*

the lapel of his blue pinstripe suit (he lived up on Grosmont Road in a big old house overlooking Winn's Common).



*Colin aged seven Conway School*

I remember the assemblies held every morning in the school hall and the hymns we sang with so much gusto, accompanied by the piano. One morning at assembly Mr Bull summoned me to the front, because I'd been talking to a mate. For this offence, in front of the whole school, he commanded me to spell "Elephant". Highly embarrassed at my predicament I began with "E.L.E... F". and the school erupted into laughter. I was so embarrassed, I felt the ground had opened up under me and, very red faced, I was told to return to the assembly

During assembly we were assembled into lines of our class. We stood whilst we sang. Occasionally, a child would faint and fall down. This was not too uncommon in those days when some children from poorer families didn't get enough food. We'd sit

while listening to speeches and so on. Whilst we sat we fidgeted and as the floor was a wood pattern parquet floor you were in danger of getting a splinter stuck in your backside.

I well remember the boy who had to endure having to stand on the teacher's desk at the front of the class while she removed a splinter with her tweezers from his bare bum on show to the entire class; of both boys and girls! I never ever complained of having a splinter at school after that and I would endure it until I got home for mum to remove it.

School dinners were held in the assembly hall. We sat at long folding tables and benches. The smell of overcooked boiled cabbage was always thick in the air. The duty teacher would patrol the dinner tables and if you didn't eat enough dinner you couldn't go up for your 'afters' (pudding). There was always usually 'seconds' if you wanted more to eat. Some times I stayed for school dinners but most often I went home for a meal.

The pig bins were always a smelly sight, lined up out the back of the kitchens in the playground with the slops of the school meals and kitchen waste. This was collected to feed the pigs kept up at the back of St Nicholas Hospital I think. I have heard that one boy would scoop some of this mush from the bin and plop it in the playground, as if he'd been sick. He would then be allowed to go home early. But he got caught doing this trick once too often and was punished for his deceit.

When school was over there was an evening teatime club you could go to for about 6d. It was held in the Assembly hall and the adjoining classrooms. We could do art or play games. We had cocoa and jam sandwiches for tea. I made a picture out of pieces of scrap

coloured cloth, which were glued onto some cardboard. Some weeks later I was told my picture was to be exhibited at an art exhibition in Central London. I went with my parents up to London to see it displayed, hanging on the wall with my name proudly labelled beside it.

I remember the two separated playgrounds, with the large wooden door in the wall between them; one playground for the infants and one for the bigger older kids. Also the boy's toilets, next to the girls, by the front gate, on Galloson Road where we boys held fiercely contended competitions to see who could pee the highest up the urinal wall. (If you were extra clever at peeing too high there was a danger of getting your own back!)



Once, while the girls were playing at their handstands and skipping games, I spotted three pennies on the steps where the girls had tied their skipping rope to the railing. I picked them up and went out of the playground to a shop on the corner of Orissa and Conway Roads where I spent them on three ice-lollies. When I returned through the school gate Miss Simms, the playground supervisor, questioned me about the money. I told her that I had picked it up on the stairs and had spent it on the lollies, one for my sister, one for a friend and one for me. I was taken up to the Headmistress and was given a lecture on theft and was then put in the cloakroom and was made to stand and watch the ice lollies melt away in a saucer, which took ages and ages.

Months later, when my mother had to visit the school for some other reason, she also came to our class to visit my teacher. I was called out to the classroom door as the teacher spoke to my mother. Mum asked my teacher how I was getting on and she replied that I was getting on fine, except for that incident! "What incident?" was my mother's shocked reaction. The teacher gave mum a brief explanation and I got a loud telling off and a good clout round the ear 'ole, in front of the class, who of course were all watching us intently. Fifty years later my younger sister Ann says that it was her that took the money, quite innocently; as she thought she'd found it and gave it to me; but I'm blow'd if I can remember that, though.

Now, talking about getting belted, I remember when we were being taught how to speak 'proper' English. The teacher would correct us when we dropped an 'H' or said "fred" instead of "thread" and so on. Well, I mean to say, our natural accent was 'Cockney' just as plain as a Welshman has a 'Taffy' accent and a Scouse has a Liverpool accent and so on. So there we all were, trying to talk "proper", just as the teacher insisted we should. Try as she might, she couldn't get us to speak the way she wanted us to pronounce things, or should I say "fings". Some managed to carry out her demands, some unfortunates just couldn't, try as they might. When they kept getting it wrong she punished them. The boys received a hard smack across the knuckles with a ruler; the girls had to stand on their desk seat to receive a hard smack on their thighs. Despite the punishments these kids still could not pronounce certain words, much to her despair. She'd ask wee Charlie to stand up and say, "Thirty feathers." Poor unsure Charlie would timidly reply "Tha, tha, firty feavers." Frail little Rosemary would be asked to say, "Harry's father threads three threads", then with her tiny frame, she'd draw in as deep a breath as she could and then rapidly reply, " 'Arry's fa'ver freds free freds." Now, years later, Cockney is a recognised legitimate accent, widely spoken without the bad

connotations that it generated back in those days of 'Queen's English' as being the only correct way to speak. When I speak in certain company I'm often self-conscious, as a result of this stupid bullying we received all those years ago. However, I feel all right nowadays if I say, "Fir'ee fousund feafers on a frushe's froat" or "Bread an' bu'er in the gu'er"!

I recall when the horse-drawn milk float overturned in Bebbington Road at the side of the school. The noise, as you can imagine, was very loud when all the glass milk bottles along with the wire milk crates crashed onto the road when the float tipped over after its wheels mounted the kerb. Something must have spooked the horse. The milkman eventually unharnessed the frightened horse and walked it up and down the road until it calmed down. What a mess there was on the road: broken glass, tipped over crates and milk running in the gutter. All the kids' faces were pressed against the windows of all the classrooms that overlooked the accident scene.

One day whilst walking home from school as I walked up Orissa Road alongside the back of the old Beasley's Brewery buildings, I heard the loud throbbing sound of aeroplanes' engines. Looking up I saw the planes were flying in formation. Suddenly, two of the planes wings collided and then, it seemed in slow motion, wings and pieces of fuselage broke off and began to fall spinning to earth, followed by the two crippled planes. Being a young child, I wondered if what I was looking at was for real. Later on though, the evening papers were full of the tragic story, with big headlines reporting this spectacular air accident. From memory, I believe that one plane crashed into the Thames and the other into the Plumstead Marshes, with the death of at least one pilot.

Another recollection was outside the gate on Galloson Road a rag-and-bone man was parked. He had jars with a goldfish swimming around in them. He said to the kids that if they brought him some clothes he'd exchange the clothes for a goldfish. Well, the result was that lots of kids went scampering off home, soon to return with their 'good' clothes and (remembering that many kids didn't possess any or very little in the way of spare clothing in those days), this was without their parents' knowledge or approval; and swapped the clothes for the goldfish! This led the school to sternly warn the children that they must not do this, and that they must not deal with this man. The school also warned him to go away and he left.

I remember the Harvest Festival, when we kids took some produce along, if we could, such as spuds or a cabbage; and how it was all piled up and arrayed in the assembly hall along with some stooks of corn. The celebration then got under way with the usual singing of such hymns as 'We Plough the Fields and Scatter' and 'All Things Bright And Beautiful'. I think the produce was later given to a local home or hospital. Also, I think that this was the time that they judged which child had grown the best nasturtium plant from seeds they had been given many weeks earlier. I always had a go, but I never managed to win. I loved their patterned leaves, and the orange/red trumpet-shaped flowers of these easy to grow plants.

Every now and then the 'Nit Nurse' would do her rounds of the school. When she got to our classroom we were all told to line up: boys in one line and girls in another. We slowly filed towards her as she closely scrutinised each child's hair and head for these pesky little passengers. Her nimble fingers and extra fine metal comb moved deftly and efficiently as straight haired and then curly locked youngsters' heads were pushed this way and that as

each head was thoroughly inspected. Then, wet-haired and cold disinfectant dribbling down our necks, we were done and the comb was dipped back into the beaker full of that strong-smelling disinfectant before it was the next child's turn.

Each year would bring another cycle of seasons. Every day we walked to school and back and often to and fro at dinner times too; we thought nothing of it then; you just did it, in all weathers and in all seasons. Other seasonal things came and went as if by magic, such as the marble season; where you played marbles at school or along the gutters all the way home, being ever mindful of the drains. The cigarette card season, where you flicked your 'fag' card up against the wall, with the fag card nearest to the wall being the winner, and then they took all the other cards behind it. The conker season, when you went over to Bostall Woods, to try and find the biggest, and shiniest, dark brown horse-chestnuts. Then, with a meat skewer, you drilled a hole through the centre of the conker and threaded a string (a bootlace was best) on to it. You then did serious battle with your opponent, each taking it in turns to hit your opponents' conker with your conker, which you held up at arms length for your opponent to hit and try to smash and break it. If you broke your opponent's conker you won and it became a 'Oner'; if your opponent's conker was a niner (nine victories) you took his score and added it to your total and it became a tenner and so on. There were many tricks used at trying to harden conkers, such as soaking them in vinegar and/or baking them in the oven.

My younger sister Ann says that when she used to walk to school and back on her own she was absolutely terrified of the big tall brewery chimney that used to belch great big clouds of black smoke. I only found this out from her around fifty years later on; amazing what went through us Common kids' minds in those now so distant days.



# Conway Road School Youth Club

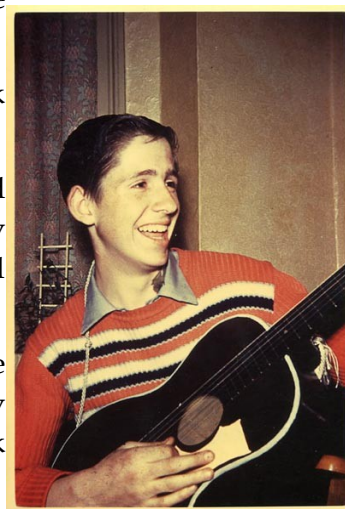
## Albert (Bert) Hooper

Yes it is Bert ('Weedon') Hooper from those days back at the Youth Club in Conway Road School.

To prove it, see the photo of myself with that first piece of junk I called a guitar.

It served its purpose at the time, although I look back and laugh at the pink painted edge I'd put on it. Pink was the only colour on offer at the time, which my father had just painted the trim in my sister's bedroom with.

I remember Roger Herbert (now Harry Layne), because he always seemed rather impressed with my attempts to play "Apache" which was indeed one of Bert Weedon's hits back then.



*Bert ('Weedon') Hooper.*

I also played "FBI" by the Shadows, and everyone's first tune "Peter Gunn", what a laugh!

As I remember, there were a few guys at the Youth Club who would just laugh their heads off at such things, and they would hit all the billiard balls with such force, all for show. No accuracy here, just plain old blast away, and then try and look like you meant it for every ball that went down.

I remember the evening when the Youth Leader said that we had to call all our shots, and I went on to be the champ of the evening.

When I got a punch in the nose in the playground later on, I thought that was my prize for being the winner that night. A few weeks later, I fell over laughing when I found out that the girl I was seeing was in fact his ex girlfriend, and she'd dumped him over belting me! I guess I won in the end, and I learned a whole bunch of things about him that would have caused him much embarrassment if I'd felt like spreading his nickname about, as she called him Mr Teeny Weenie!

The day I met Shirley Wicks at the Youth Club, I chased her down the stairs, and hit my head on the low concrete beam of the stair above. She took me into the staff room and helped the Youth Leader clean me up, and then Barry Wilson from Tuam Road walked me up to St Nick's Hospital, where they cleaned it up some more and sprayed plastic skin on it.

Barry Wilson and myself continued to go to the club after that, but I started spending more time with Shirley, and my visits became fewer.

One thing I would say is that it was the encouragement from nice blokes such as Roger that gave me the desire to continue on with my guitar playing.

I've played almost continuously since those days, which has enabled me to be on TV over here in Canada a few times, plus lots of work on quite a few records with some of the Church Choirs I've been involved with.

I'm remarried to my old flame from the 70's, who I met at work, and who also joined a huge choir and band with myself back then.

We still sing duets in Church, and we both play about with writing and composing.

I've also progressed to a Yamaha Keyboard, so I can add a few other Digital Instruments into our compositions.

See what encouragement can help start.

Roger also liked my drawing skills, from when I helped make up some posters for the Youth Club.

I went on to become a Building / Surveying / Architectural Draughtsman at H. J. Furlong & Sons in Woolwich, and then the Architectural Planning Department of British Columbia Telephone Company, here in Canada.

This type of work became known globally as The Building Industry Consulting Service, and it was our job to help Architects, Engineers, and Building Developers, to design and provide Telephone Distribution Systems within their projects. It was a great ride, and after 30 years at BC Tel, later to become Telus, they offered me a full pension at 55, plus a huge bonus, which took a whole heartbeat to think about!

So you see that through Roger's encouragement with my drawing and draughting abilities, look where that has taken me.

The previous picture of Cherry and me was from a photo shoot they were doing at our church for the Church Directory in 2005, which was also a sales opportunity for the photographer.

I took the guitar along so we'd be able to use it on a homemade CD some day soon.

Thanks again Roger for all your kind encouragement.



*Bert and Cherry in 2005.*



*Bert, up the pole in his back garden.*

*Photo: David Morrison.*

# *Cooks Farm*

*Dave Carpenter*

My mother's maiden name was Edith (Bunty) Cook. She was one of four sisters, Mary, Katherine (Bill) and Eleanor. They were born to Aida Cook of Cooks Farm, Plumstead. My grandfather was one of eight children, five boys and three girls.

My grandfather farmed at Blackfen and Danson Park before taking on Cooks Farm, after my grandfather died. They used to hold children's parties on the farm, so the place was very well known. My grandfather had a stroke and collapsed on the manure heap and he was found sometime later and taken back to the house in a wheelbarrow, where he died.

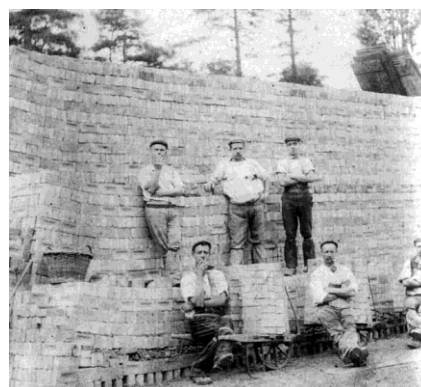
My grandmother (Aida) was not able to keep the farm running (she had no sons) so it was sold, together with a large area of woodland, to the Council for a pittance.



*Cook family, c.1935. Edith (Bunty), Catherine (Bill), Aida & Hilda in the front row.*



*Walter Cook, C.1920.*



*Brick works on King's Highway (late Victorian era). The excavated area of the old brick works was later developed into the Rockcliffe Gardens..  
Photo: Clare Crawford.*

The Council turned the farm into allotments. It was still like it when I took my children there some years ago. I now live on the south coast and have not been back since.

Cooks farm was situated between the bottom of Bostall Hill where the Maybloom club is situated and Wickham Lane School. In the other direction Wickham Lane and the other by Bostall Woods,



*Postcard of Cooks Orchard, Bostall Woods, Plumstead.*

this boundary being Old Park Road, bordered it on one side. This is where Dick Turpin's caves were. The farm also covered the area known as the Brickworks. The section of woods became known as Bostall Woods, which is at the bottom of Bostall Hill.

In the post card picture of Cooks Farm, the building on the left was the bakery and they had to get the water from a well across the lane. I know this still exists, but not where my aunt Bill (Katherine) told me she knew where it was. Unfortunately she passed away twenty years ago. I have quite a lot of old photographs, including one of my great grandfather Cook with my great grandmother and their eight children. I have this hanging in my lounge. As a matter of interest, the whole area from Rockcliffe Gardens, the bus garage (now long gone, and now the site of a Mega Store) and Alliance Road to the edge of Bostall Woods is undermined with huge cavernous chalk workings. A large area subsided before the war. Alliance Road was closed for years afterwards.

As a youngster I often played at Fanny on the Hill. What a great place it was. A stream, the river Plum, ran through the bottom of the valley, it fed a large overgrown lake that was full of great crested newts. They tunnelled the stream and in-filled the valley with household refuse. It was here that my mates and me used to ride around all weekends on a huge Ariel motorbike (well it seemed like it at the time; we were about 14 years old). We became so good at it that we could beat the AJS works trials riders on most of the hills.



*Aida Cook with daughter Bunty.*

# *Dick (Cyril Dixey) Remembers*

*Cyril Dixey*

I was born 18<sup>th</sup> July 1935. In July 1940, I started school, aged five, at Conway Road.

On the first day, at assembly, sitting on benches, youngest at the front, graduating in age to the back, for whatever reason, I stuck a pin in the boy sitting next to me, into his backside! Naturally he let out a cry. Cyril Bull, the Headmaster, said, "Who was that?" The boy raised his arm aloft. "He stuck a pin in my bottom," pointing at me. "Did you?" he asked me. "Yes sir." His index finger beckoned me to the stage steps and I ascended to the stage where my head went between his knees and my backside was severely whacked, three times. I don't think I cried. In the assembly was my aunt, Iris Turner.



*Cyril, 1957.  
Photo: Richard  
Dixey.*

Very eventful first day at school! The lesson was never forgotten. I went home after school and was so ashamed I didn't say anything to my mother, as you didn't in those days. Three days after the punishment my mother asked me about what had happened at school. My aunt had split on me. But my mother, who was a gentle woman, said, "Try not to be naughty and keep out of trouble."

That same week gas masks were issued to all the pupils, from a warden's house close by the school. So, in hindsight, a tanned backside was nothing.

Regarding the cars in Sladedale Road, my uncle, Doug Turner, had motorcycles, a Matchless and then a Triumph. He then bought a Wolsesley, sports, 'black with a canvas top'. My father bought a second hand Ford, possibly the only two cars in the whole road.

The families in the road were as follows:

We lived at number 4.

At number 14 was my grandmother and granddad.

The next person would have been Mr Everest and family. He was a builder.

Number 11 was the Rumbold's, man and wife. It was a shop at that time. They sold sweets and cake when available, and other bits and pieces.



*Sladedale Road at night. This is the approximate area where public air raid shelters were situated in the road during WWII. Photo: Alan Read.*

Number 13 was garages: they sold oil for fires, batteries or radios and cigarettes and let out garages as well.

At number 31 they had no mother or father but there were two sisters; the older one was married; the younger was about ten years older than me, but a real favourite of mine. She took me swimming at Plumstead Baths and piggy backed me two or three lengths. I think their surname was Slark.

There was a group of us, 'our gang,' of about ten or twelve kids. We were not troublesome; we usually went up to Winn's Common, next to the Slade School, where there were various shops and we would buy a loaf of bread and a bottle of Tizer. Then onto the Common and have a picnic: 'hot' fresh bread! We'd break and share the bread and the bottle of drink. After the feast we would play Cowboys and Indians. We would be about five to ten years of age, boys and girls.

On occasions the air raid sirens would go off and we would seek cover under the trees. We probably thought we were safe. When the siren sounded the 'all clear', we continued our game and then later we would go home for tea. Other times we would 'treasure hunt' for shrapnel that would be lying around on the Common and often it would still be warm. It soon went rusty, though.

We had a large public air raid shelter in our road. It was built shortly after the war started. It was situated outside my gran's house, at number 14, opposite her front door. It took up half the width of the road and stretched roughly 30 – 40ft up the road with the entrance halfway between both sections. The shelters were built in two parts. This was in case one shelter was bombed and the occupants in the other half had a better chance of surviving. There was also another shelter built in the 'Hollow', accessed via a flight of concrete steps from Sladedale Road, about 100 yards from my home. The shelter in the Hollow was at rooftop level with the houses in Roydene Road. One night an air raid took out five or six terraced houses in Roydene Road, with fatalities. These bombed houses were only 30 yards from the shelters that we were in. Next morning we got up from the bunk beds to make our way home; my



*Brother's Doug and Geoff, Sladedale Road, 1955.*



*Cyril Dixey Snr in uniform  
1945.*

*Photo ;Richard Dixey.*

grandmother said she smelt burning and she looked around to see what had happened and the gap in the rooftops told the story. I remember on one occasion when the air raid siren was wailing and my dad, Cyril, was carrying me in the dark down the steps on the way to the shelters when he tripped, but he managed to hang on to me and we got to the shelters in time. I would have been about five or six years of age.

There were about two or three houses at the junction of Parkdale and Lakedale

Roads that were destroyed by bombs and also up the hill in Parkdale Road, at the brow of the hill, on the left, two to three houses were also destroyed. I don't know about any casualties as so much was happening at that time during the war.

Up the hill from our house in Sladedale road, on the brow of the hill where Dickins shop was, on the corner of Goldsmid and Sladedale Roads, an anti aircraft gun would always position itself when the air raids were in full swing.

Up near the paddling pool area towards King's Highway there was a large ditch dug, about eight feet wide by about six deep. I think it was there as a trap to stop any German gliders landing during an invasion attempt.



# *Dogfight Over Blackfen, September 1940*

*By Eric*

During a daylight raid in the Battle of Britain a dogfight was overhead and suddenly we saw an aircraft starting to fall. I was sure it was enemy; my father had different opinions. It turned out to be a Me109 with a yellow nose, on fire and falling. As it got lower something left the aircraft, which apparently was the pilot, but unfortunately he was too low and his chute failed to open.

The aircraft crashed on Plumstead Common; I believe it hit a row of shops.

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# *Earl Rise School Remembered*

*Derek Boswell*

In 1937 I was living with my parents in Piedmont Road. My local school was Conway Road, but my mother attended Earl Street and therefore decided to send me there. (Mind you, as my school days went on I would rather it have been Conway Road School as I later found that, in my opinion, it was a much better school.)

I started at Earl Rise after the Easter holiday; school intakes were at the beginning of every term. The Headmistress was a Miss Widger, generally known as 'Widge'. I cannot remember the names of every teacher but they did have a kindergarten class run by a Miss Humphrey. Parents could voluntarily place their three year olds there, and they had toys to play with. Each afternoon these children were expected to have a lie down and I recall that in the summer months, and when the weather was good, they had little fold up camp beds in the playground.



*Derek and brother Ken with parents.*

My teacher was a Mrs Painter, who I believe lived in Chestnut Rise. The classrooms were generally all situated around the central Hall. The school entrance for the youngest pupils was in Earl Rise but older children entered via Elm (later) Elmley Street. Our classroom had four rows of double desks consisting of boys and girls. The room rose up via a succession of steps so that the teacher at the front had a good view of everyone. Even at five years of age and on my first day at school we were not allowed to talk or walk around. Sheer purgatory for a child not used to such discipline.

Gas lamps lit the school in those days only and on dark winter days the school caretaker would come round with a long pole, reaching up to light the lamps. Large steel pipes situated around the walls heated the schoolrooms.

One of my greatest disappointments was when the Headmistress told my mother that I would receive a cake on my birthdays. This turned out to be a wooden cake affair, presented to the child in the school hall. Not a lovely edible delicious cake but a token wooden replica!

My strongest memory of Earl Rise was of the second class I was in. Each successive year we went up into a different class and this class was run by a Miss Morris. She was a typical old spinster, probably then about 55 years of age, though to me she seemed as old as Methuselah. I do know that she had taught my aunt in the early part of the century, so must have been near retirement. At the time I thought she was the strictest person it would have been possible to meet, but I realise now that she was in fact an excellent teacher.

Through her I reckon that I learned most of my basic three R's. She used to keep an oval tin on her desk full of dolly mixtures. If one did particularly well in something, she would say, "Come out hear and shut your eyes and pick a sweet." Of course they were tiny sweets and a quarter of a pound would last her ages. There was one particular sweet in the selection that

was much larger than the others, and of course, the kids would feel for this and pick it. She had travelled around Europe a bit and had collected a fair number of postcards. She was in the habit of distributing these to the children at times, generating an interest in, what then seemed far away places.

I was fortunate in that I was one of the better readers in the class and several times she passed me books to read that were no longer required by the school. One of these I had for years and was entitled 'Rice Pudding' the story of rice production, to encourage children to eat their rice pudding.

Many things of course about those days are long forgotten but very few of us, if any, would ever have imagined what our lives would be like in the 21st century.

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# *Elizabeth Bobin (nee Doherty) Remembers*

I was born in the British Home for Mothers and Babies in 1958. Mum had a terrible time and said she'd never do it again and she kept to her word.



At that time we lived at No 11 Helen Street, Woolwich. It was just by the side of Woolwich Arsenal Station. The house is now sadly knocked down and is a car park. We left there when I was about ten or eleven and I kissed every wall goodbye in the three bedroom house, sadly, I don't have any photos of the outside of it.

At the weekends my mum and dad would take me to a club just around the corner from where we lived. It was a really big building, it is now used as a Temple I think.

I went to Bloomfield Infants School. Later on I went to Fox Hill Junior School. I was disliked by the Headmaster, Mr Hodges, who, I recall, only liked the boys. I left there around 1969/70. I still have the book they gave me when I left. My favourite teacher there was Mr Mortimer. I understood EVERYTHING he said. During my four years at that school I came 14th, 17th and 18th in my class, but in Mr Mortimer's class I came 2nd. Considering I was with the same bunch of kids during those four years, it proves something doesn't it? I also remember Mr Givens and Miss Hutton.

I then went on to Plumstead Manor School. Every morning I would take a bus to Bannockburn Road to meet my best friend at her house and then walk up the hill to school. Bet I couldn't walk that now.

I also lived at Boyard Road; this was quite near to Fox Hill School. It was just a walk down the hill, take the first right, and there it was, a big council estate, built around 1969/70.

From there we moved to Francis Street, Woolwich, right on the main road, close to Woolwich Dockyard Station.

I have so many fond memories of Woolwich. Shopping in the market with my mum for veg in the square and around the stalls on the High Pavement as we called it.

I remember Del Capellos the hairdresser's and the 'covered inn market', but the best shop in Woolwich was surely Cuffs Department Store. It sold everything, from furniture to ribbon. I loved the way they put your money into a pod, which went up a chute, into piping that went around the walls and ceiling, and was sucked up to the cash department upstairs. You had to wait for your receipt and change to come back down the chute. This was a similar system that was used by Liberty's in Regent Street and possibly still is. It was the beginning of the end when they closed down Cuffs.

Did you know that the first McDonald's in Powis Street was the very first one located in this country?

Another firm favourite of mine to shop at was Marks and Spencer's.

The Wimpy Bars were brilliant too. In those days you got real fried onions and the tomato sauce was in those big fat round red plastic containers, situated on all the tables, none of that stupid sachet lark. I recall they were all staffed by Turkish men.

My mum and dad were Irish. They came over to Woolwich, where my dad's sister Peg was already living, in about 1951. My parent's names were Margaret Farrell and Matthew Francis Doherty. They had a couple of rooms on the second floor of No 11 Helen Street. They cooked on a stove on the landing.

When my auntie eventually moved out my parents took over the ground floor, which consisted of another two rooms and a kitchen, the toilet was off of this, and a backyard. There were several other families that lived, one next to the other, on the middle floor. It was weird having to walk past their rooms to get to bed. Eventually mum couldn't stand it and when she got the chance she also took over the middle floor. There was never a bathroom, or central heating.

I remember the day when man landed on the moon. I was in the sitting room. (Not the best sitting room as that was at the front of the house and only used for guests and at Christmas time). I recall being totally awestruck by the Apollo Mission.

The house was always damp and cold. I remember having bad chest infections for most of the time and then pneumonia and asthma and bronchitis and also really bad toothache. I would get big gum abscesses because two of my back teeth were rotten. I didn't get to a dentist until we moved away from Helen Street.

At the end of the road lived a very old couple. They were called Mabel and, I think, Fred. Fred frequently beat Mabel. They were always drunk and she was a tiny frail little old thing. She was always black and blue. I never knew if they were married, or whether they were mother and son or what? At the end of the road also lived a girl called Linda Weekly who, because of our move, I lost touch with about 40 years ago. Also at the end was a fish and chip shop, where we kids used to hang about and see if he would give us bags of crackling for free or very cheap.

Plumstead started to change as more Asian immigrants moved in. This was great for curry lovers.

My mum was forever taking me to St Nicholas Hospital (now long gone). When we moved we had to use the hospitals up Shooters Hill. Some of them have also gone now and some turned into luxury apartments.

In all the years of living near an army barracks I have to say that I never ever met a soldier. How strange is that?

Us youngsters used to go to the Shakespeare. It was a place for booze, music and dancing. I was under-age, but looked grown up. We also went to the Welcome Inn, in Eltham, on a Sunday evening.

My mum used to be an usherette in the cinema that was situated on the High Pavement. When the film Calamity Jane was released she was dressed up as Calamity and paraded

round town on a float advertising the film. There were photographs taken of her on the Woolwich Ferry, dressed in a leather skirt with fringe, plus a hat and a gun. These photos were published in the Kentish Times or the Mercury newspaper. (My mum and I spent many hours looking through micromesh film in a library in Blackheath, trying to find these pictures of her, but we never spotted them. She died shortly after this and she really wanted to see them again.)

In one of the end houses, in another road I once lived in, was the MacNelly family. There were quite a few of them. One of them, this was when we were both very little, was Ronnie MacNelly, who was then my boyfriend. When he was a teenager he was accidentally killed. It happened near the main Woolwich Post Office, at a building called the Tram Shed. He was stealing lead from the roof and fell through it. You know you always think that someone was THE ONE for you? Well he was my ONE. I'm sure, had he lived, we would have met up at some point as adults and got married. (The Tram Shed was converted into a sort of fringe type theatre and, I think, still is today. Funny, I recently bought a Spike Milligan DVD and the Tram Shed was mentioned in it)

Yes, Woolwich, the place where my heart lies. (2009)



*This is a photograph of Elizabeth Ann Doherty and her (soon to become) auntie Pamela Mumford (who grew up in Plumstead). The year is about 1963. It was taken outside the corner shop, which was on both Helen Street and another road. This was the road that the McNell's lived in. Behind us, at the end of that road, is the Tram Shed; beyond it is the main Post Office.*



*Me and my mum in 1959.*



*Mum, Margaret Doherty (nee Farrell) taken in our best front room. C1963. The chairs were red plastic with grey cushions. The carpet was multicoloured, who knows what colour the wallpaper was. She never could put colours together well. Spot the old radiogram, the height of fashion in those days. Tom Jones and other 60's singers were heard singing their hearts out. And the old record player is located underneath it. Spot the wooden clothes horse in the corner. We weren't rich but we were always warm, fed, well dressed and clean.*



*The wedding of Margaret Farrell and Matthew Francis Doherty in St Peter's Catholic Church. New Road, Woolwich, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1953,*

*Margaret was a Hospital Matron's maid and Matthew was a Cattle Food Makers labour at the time.*



*This is a very sulky looking me at the Slade Swings, Plumstead. c.1962.*



*Elizabeth Ann Doherty, in that best sitting room again, with her beloved dog Sandy, 11 Helen Street.*

# *Errands & Shop Memories.*

*Colin Weightman*

Going on errands to the local shops was every child's call of duty it would seem. Sent off on an errand to get a forgotten item, usually tightly clutching a few coins wrapped in a hastily scrawled note with the item(s) required.

I remember being sent down the hill by mum to get a portion of chips for my younger sister Ann, who was at home recovering from a cold. On returning home up the hill I thought that I would check in between the folds of newspaper that wrapped the chips, as often the odd chip or so could be found lodged in them. I only found one chip, which, soon swallowed, only wet my appetite more. So I sneaked a chip... and then another... and another... Before I knew it I had eaten most of the chips! When I reached home and mum unwrapped them



*Plumstead High Street, c1950.*

there was just a few chips left! A good clout and a telling off and I was sent back down the hill to get some more.

Another time mum sent me to O'Rourke's the butchers situated in Plumstead High Street.

I was sent to get a pound of rump steak from them. On returning home mum unwrapped it and was very angry! She told me to take it straight back and to tell them that it's horsemeat! She was a regular

customer at O'Rourke's the butchers. If they'd known who my mum was they wouldn't have tried to cheat her small son. She would have given them a real good Irish telling off when she was next at their shop.

My dad used to work at O'Rourke's during the busy time just prior to Christmas. Dad had been an apprentice butcher as a boy. So he did this part time job helping at this very busy period, preparing the fowl.

He worked a regular night work job and this part time seasonal job brought in a few more valuable pounds for the family at Christmas. His job was to 'draw' the birds' entrails out and remove the ligaments from their legs. He would process many hundreds of birds during those weeks preceding Christmas. He would slit the birds rear, insert his hand and draw out all its innards. The procedure repeated hundreds of times each day to chickens, ducks and turkeys. I remember how bad his hands became, bright red and very tender, because of the huge volume of birds that he got through.

As well as O'Rourke's my mother would also shop at the Co-op butchers, located at the big RACS stores in Lakedale Road. She would often buy a pig's head for a shilling (1/-), or sometimes half a pig's head for sixpence (6d). With this she would make some brawn. Dad would cut it up for her and he would offer me its eyeball, stuck on the tip of his

finger staring at me, saying to me, "Here you are son, this will see you through the week!"

One year mum won the raffle at the Co-op butchers, winning a big Christmas hamper. She was so surprised and very delighted she couldn't believe her good luck.

Another errand that I was occasionally sent on was when any of us kids got a boil. Dad would then send me on my way with a jug down to the Beasley's Brewery to get a jug of yeast.

I would get this frothy liquid by entering the brewery and then into the yeast settling troughs situated in a big room where the yeast was held in large concrete troughs. The brewery worker would dip the jug into the frothy mix and fill the jug with it. Dad reckoned it was the best cure for boils and such like ailments. On the way home I'd secretly swig a drop of the bitter dark brown liquid that seeped from the frothy yeast which collected in the bottom of the jug. Dad would give us kids a few big desert spoonfuls of this liquid and froth.

I recall when on the way home from school an elderly neighbour, Mrs. Thompson, who lived just down the hill from our house, asked me as I passed her gate, "Colin, could you pop down the road and get me a pound of King Edwards?" So off I went, and run down the hill to Welch's the greengrocers. On my return she thanked me and gave me a whole two bob bit!

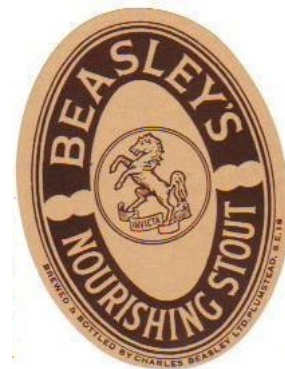
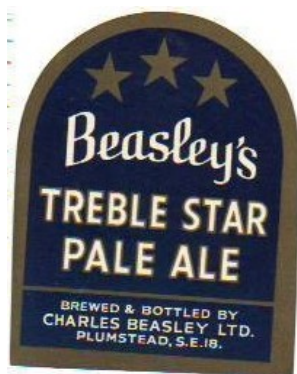
I couldn't believe my luck! A whole two shillings for me, in my hot little hand!

I rushed home and told my mum that I had been on an errand for her friend Mrs Thompson.

Mum sternly asked me, "Did she give you anything?" I answered, "two shillings." Well, with that mum gave me a clip round the ear with the stern rebuke, "Take it back at once!" I crept back down to her house, through her gate and then slid the money silently through her letterbox.

I often thought later, I wonder if Mrs Thompson ever spotted it and, if so, did she wonder where it came from, or did she know?

Such were the strong principles held by our parents towards us Common kids in those days.



*Beasley's beer labels from the 1950's.*

# *Evacuated From South London To Kent*

*This story was submitted by Helena Noifeld on behalf of*

*Daphne Roma Thompson (nee Crawford)*

I was eleven and my sister Jean Crawford was nine. We were living in Plumstead. We are told there is going to be a war; many children from Ancona Road School, Plumstead, where we lived, are going to be cared for somewhere safe. We were fitted with a gas mask and told to carry it at all times.

In the summer of 1939 we set off by steam train from Plumstead Station. We'd never been on a steam train before, or even far from our homes; we were excited; it seemed like an adventure; we didn't even know where we were going. We arrived at Paddock Wood station; it seemed miles from home.

Ushered by teachers to the village church we assembled, collected emergency rations and waited to be allocated to our homes. Ours was eventually Rose Cottage on Overy Farm with our foster parents and their daughters,

Irene and Margaret. We soon became accepted as part of their family. Little did we know that we would be there for five years.

Rose cottage was surrounded by countryside, hop fields, orchards and farm animals; wonderful, since this was something we only read about. There were no buses or trams and chickens laid eggs!

I loved the country life; our foster parents, Constance and George Farley, were so kind and we felt at home. I shall never forget my experience of the war. I am still in touch with Irene Farley. We still reminisce; life was both happy and sad.

*Editors footnote: Photo was added to story.*

*WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at [bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](http://bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar)'*



*Labelled evacuees wave their goodbyes.*

# *Fred Strong Remembers*

*Fred Strong, born 1929*

“The evening of May 8<sup>th</sup> 1945, the end of the war, saw merriment and dancing around the corner of The Ship public house. Complete strangers hugged each other and danced to accordions. There was lots of drinking and high spirits, but no brawls. Not far away, opposite The Star, there were bombed houses but this was a time for celebration.

As children we’d get taken out on Sundays. We walked, as we couldn’t afford buses. We’d come up Lakedale Road, down Swingate Lane, Edison Road (then fields) and Wickham Street to Fanny on the Hill, which in those days was an old wooden shack half way down the hill. Then we’d go on down the hill to Wickham Lane, then on to Plumstead High Street till we reached home in Barth Road.

Another route was up Lakedale Road to the Boating Lake on Winn’s Common, where we’d spend an afternoon with dad. He’d wear his Sunday suit, which my mother would have just redeemed from Pritchard’s pawnshop at the top of Kentmere Road. On one occasion a child fell into the lake, and dad jumped into the lake in his Sunday suit to save him, which caused great distress



*Boating lake, Winn’s Common c1900. (Which became a playground area after sustaining bomb damage during WWII)*

because my mother couldn’t pawn it on Monday, but had to get it cleaned instead.

Buses stopped and turned round at the Woodman pub, and as children we would hop on the back of a bus while the driver and conductor were at the Ravine Café and take the used tickets from the box and make concertinas from them. We used to have competitions amongst ourselves to see who could make the longest.”

*Editor’s footnote: Photo added to original story.*

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# *Frills, Furbloes, Veils And Handkerchiefs*

*Shelia Lee (nee Jordan)*

During my happy childhood in Plumstead, 'Lower Plumstead' as it is now called, I spent a great deal of time with my great-grandmother, Harriet Pearce, who lived just a few doors away from us in Hartville Road.

Harriet had come to London from Bawtrey in Yorkshire, as a position had been obtained for her working as a housemaid in St Margaret's Grove. She was twelve years old! How she actually got to Plumstead and why Plumstead we do not know. For many years her little straw suitcase in which she carried her few belongings for her journey to Plumstead was stowed in a cupboard; I remember it very clearly.

It was around the time of the building of the 'Plumstead Estate', which stretched from the Common to the boundary of the Dockyard. The houses closest to the Common were very grand: these accommodated the managerial staff; the houses were slightly smaller further down the hill, towards Lakedale Road, built for mid-management; and then, closer to the Royal Arsenal, hundreds of small terraced dwellings, built for the families of the huge workforce. We lived in this section, but Harriet, having become familiar with the 'middle class' way of life as a servant, endeavoured to emulate that lifestyle on a smaller scale. She was dignified and proud and modelled herself on Queen Mary.

Once a year, just before Christmas, she always took me to Heddle's, a large draper's shop in Thomas Street. We always took the bus, which terminated just outside. In we marched ceremoniously. Harriet would sit herself down on one of the high chairs provided and, after the normal salutations, would ask to see 'your finest men's handkerchiefs'. Out came the glass fronted boxes, stacked from floor to ceiling. There was much fingering to judge for quality and discussion about durability. Finally a decision and the selected handkerchiefs would be solemnly wrapped with brown paper and string. Transaction completed, and with more salutations, the door solemnly opened for us by the manager and home we went. Christmas shopping for the men done and dusted!



Harriet had a hat! It was quite large, just like Queen Mary wore, in a stiff black felt with a large brim. Just before Easter, every year, the hat had to be refurbished. So off we went to Woolwich, on the tram on these occasions, to visit Woolworth's in Hare Street. Straight to the 'trimmings' counter, where there were flowers, veils, ribbons, buttons and bows. Much deliberation took place as to what colour they should be, how large or small,

not too showy and, of course, sewing thread to match exactly, the hat had to attend many and varied occasions. A short walk down Hare Street to the tram terminus at the Ferry and we were on our way back home to Plumstead, Grandma Harriet clutching her precious purchases which would restore her hat gloriously for the coming year.

# *From A Child's Perspective*

*Chris Kitchener*

On the bombsite of what used to be 4 Ennis Road, some men showed up one day. Since, after the bombing, we had moved into number 8, I suppose I considered the bombsite my playground, so I investigated. One of the men I spoke to told me that it was his job to mend the wall of number 8 that had been damaged by the bomb, and after that to mend some of the other houses up the road. I thought, HIS JOB! Wow! That meant that he spent all day outdoors mending houses. What a great job, outside all day! And I told him that I thought that he had the best job in the world. He smiled, a sad smile, and looked first at the bombsite then down at his bleeding hands. " No mate" he said " You don't want this job, there are better ones," and then he tousled my hair and went back to work.

It took me a few years of growing up to understand what he had told me.



# *From Country Boy To A Town Boy*

*John Miles*

*The war years*

Evacuated at the age of four with my sister, aged eight, to Devon. We escaped most of the war. We returned for a year, but as it got bad again we were sent back to Devon. We finally came back when I was nine, to stay at my grandmother's house at Chancelot Road, or as we called it, 'Chance your lot' Road, just off Tin Cheque Alley, McLeod Road, Abbey Wood, where the Co-op was. We lived here for the next two years.

Our house at Belvedere was being lived in by a bombed out family, I can remember going to Federation Woods where there was a prisoner of war camp and getting cigarettes and sweets from one or two of the prisoners.

There were plenty of bombsites around to play on and make cycle tracks. We would race around on home made go-carts (Perhaps this is what children need today: a sense of adventure and achievement).

I remember an aeroplane crashing at what they called 'The Point,' it was a British plane with a Polish crew. It had hit a Barrage Balloon cable with the loss of the crew.

I also recall the Doodlebug shot down by the guns on Bostall Heath; they had hit it in the wrong place, which made it come straight down onto Smithies Road.

I was born in Woolwich, at the British Hospital For Mother and Babies; my mum and dad lived in Charlton at the time.

Bostall Lane was my first school that I went to after the war. On a Saturday morning I would get sixpence from my moneybox for Saturday morning pictures at the Kinema at the bottom of Lakedale Road. I remember the Kinema Rangers. The sixpence was for my tram fare, the pictures, and two Woodbines, which soon came to an end when mother found out!

Later on I got a Saturday job with Charley Roberts, who was just out of the army and had started a greengrocery business, delivering around the streets. He also had a shop just off of Plumstead High Street. We would also go up to the Market at about five in the morning, to load up for the day. It was at this time that I saw a banana for the first time. It was very much an 'under the counter' job and anyone who bought enough vegetables would get the bananas!

We went to the Royal Artillery Theatre. It cost one shilling up in the gods. Showing there was Cinderella and Tony Hancock. He was playing the part of Buttons and he was about sixteen years old. It was the first pantomime I had been to. I still go each year and will be going shortly to see Dick Whittington (November 2006).

As the war finished sweets became available (although we used to get them in the country). The first shop to sell them locally was near the Middle Gate of the Arsenal, but you had to take a pound of sugar and the rest in money. You would get in the queue and watch them making the sweets.



I also got my first new bike from Plumstead High Street. I had bikes before this, but they were either borrowed or made up ones.

We used to get Bradshaw's coaches, in Lakedale Road, to go on day trips to the coast, at the front of the Bradshaw's greengrocer's shop, and the family used to come out to see us off.

My grandfather worked for Mr Beasley on the Dray carts. He loved his horses. He took my sister and



*A Beasley's Brewery dray, just left the brewery, heading down Lakedale Road going past 'Head's' the Greengrocer's.*



*My grandfather Oliver Miles who worked at Beasley's Brewery:  
Photo: John Miles.*

me around the Brewery and also to see his horses in their stables. In the Bottling Dept. the noise was deafening; my mother also worked there. Mr Beasley did a bit of woodcarving and we had a black man's head carved by him. We don't have it now as my mother sold it for fifteen pounds to a tinker who came to the front door.

My granddad also drove the horse and carriage for Mr Beasley. When the motorcar eventually arrived, he went on to drive that. I remember my granddad taking me to Hastings and taking me to see Mr Beasley's family grave, which is just outside Hastings. At one time Beasley's had a strike, which he refused to join and was sent to Coventry by the rest of the workers. My nan and granddad, or to give them their proper titles, nana and papa, met when they were chauffeur and maid in a country house. I wonder if any one remembers Robinson Clever and the Wurlitzer Organ at the Granada Woolwich; what a wonderful sight and sound; I still can't get his signature tune out of my mind!

# *Gardens And Their Secrets*

*Colin Weightman*

I remember when growing up in Sladedale Road that I was very keen on gardening. I was allowed to look after one side of our back garden.

I used to order and buy a gardening magazine out of my very meagre amount of pocket money. Being so very keen and green fingered I loved learning about plants and also buying them when I could afford them, planting them in the soil and watching them grow. It was an immense buzz for me.



*Colin aged 11, Sladedale Road.1955.*

I got a paper round and one of my customers was an elderly lady by the name of Miss H. She lived on Chestnut Rise in a huge old Victorian house. She let the top half to a young working couple. Miss H. was bed-ridden and paralysed from the neck down and was unable to walk or even use her hands and arms.

When I scored this paper round, from a friend, David Jones who lived in Parkdale Road, I inherited Miss H. along with the paper round. I didn't mind at all.

The routine was that I delivered her daily evening paper and made her a cup of tea every day, which she drank through a bent glass straw from the cup placed on a bedside cabinet that she lent over and drank from. I would drop her paper in to her as she lay in her bed, in the front room. I'd then go up the passage to make her a cuppa in the scullery. Whilst waiting for the kettle to boil, I noticed that she had a large back garden and it was very overgrown. I asked her if it was OK for me to dig it over and make it into a garden and she agreed to this. Happily I would carry my dad's gardening tools around each day and get stuck into it. It had loads of brick rubble, broken glass, tangled wire and other rubbish buried amongst the huge deep-rooted weeds and convolvulus grass. (I suppose this was rubble from war damage to the house during WWII judging by the amount of broken window glass and brick rubble.) But despite this I was very happy in the knowledge that I had this entire garden just for myself to use. I soon had it dug over, weeded, and raked over nice and level ready for planting. I planted all kinds of vegetables and some flowers. I learnt how to grow plants for the first time ever, such as celery; and how to put brown paper around it as it grew, and how to grow lettuces, placing an elastic band round the leaves to form a good firm heart. Also, how to mould up the soil round the spouting spuds; to make trestles from twigs to train the garden peas; and to tie up string for the runner beans to climb up. I read about why it was important to 'dead head' plants and so much more. I was in my element, I loved it so much, and it was heaven.

As I said, it was my job to deliver Miss H. her paper. I would enter her unlocked, very large front door and into the front passage and then enter into her front room, where she lay in a large double bed. Now the strange thing is that, quite often, as I entered her room with her cuppa, I'd see that she would quickly put her hands under the bedclothes, rustling quite loudly the open newspaper on her bed. She was supposed to turn the pages with a stick with a rubber on the end that she held in her mouth. She always looked guilty but I never said anything and made out that I saw nothing. But being a young kid, I was a bit put off by seeing this as it gave me the creeps. This would happen all too often.

One day, I came to her house, much earlier than my usual time, probably to do some gardening on a Saturday morning, unexpected by her. I entered into the passage as usual and I looked up at a figure standing on the stair landing. It was Miss H., standing there in her long nightdress! As our eyes met she let out a scream and I felt my hair stand on end, what with the sudden sound and the sight of her standing there.

I quickly walked back outside and went away. After that incident, whenever I delivered her paper and made her cup of tea, I would deliberately make some noise in advance, to let her know I was there.

Neither her nor me ever mentioned anything about that episode.

Not so long after that our family moved away from Plumstead and I had to leave my wonderful gardens that I loved so much.

I found out much later that the Home Help people finally caught her out as a fraud. I felt very sad for her really, but as to what happened to her after that, I don't know.

I often thought about my lovely garden, gradually being reclaimed by the weeds and my plants going to seed and being choked by the army of tangly growing weeds.

We only had a small back yard where we moved to in East London and it was mostly covered over in concrete. Amongst the many things that I lost because of that sad move from Plumstead was my deep love of gardening.



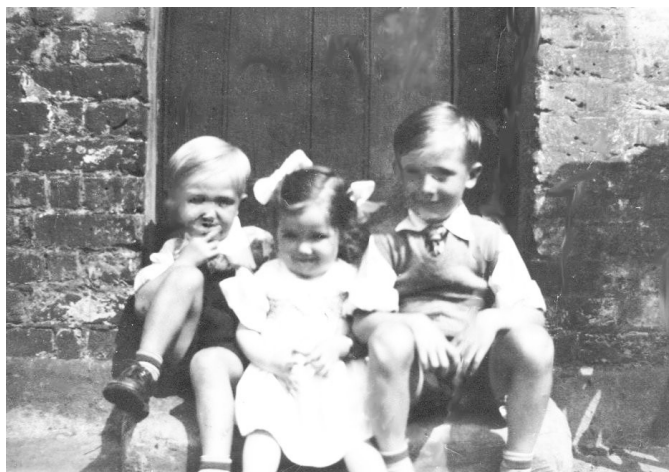
# Going Down The 'Oller

*Colin Weightman.*

The Hollow, or as we kids pronounced it, 'The 'oller', was a long strip of disused land, stretching for about 120 yards or so between the terraced houses on the ravine side of Sladedale Road. The 'oller was our playground. A sloping strip of wasteland overgrown with weeds and shrubs and had a large central holly bush.

The 'oller was the place to be on bonfire night. Maureen Dunmall (nee Reed) recalls, "I remember the bonfire nights we used to have on the wasteland (the 'oller) next to my house, all the children in the street would help build the bonfire weeks before bonfire night, building up the big bonfire with every scrap of wood and anything that we could find that would burn. We'd all congregate there on the big night and let off our fireworks." The guy was sat atop the piled up stack, which was dowsed with petrol and with a whoosh and a ball of flame it was set on fire. Then the fireworks were let of and the fun began.

Maureen' and her older brothers, Charlie and John, lived next to the 'oller at number 72. Us boys were close friends as kids, always having lots of adventures together. They could walk directly into the 'oller from their back garden.



*John, Maureen and Charlie Reed, at their back garden door, 72 Sladedale Road. c 1955.*

The 'oller was a good place to build a camp. In the summer a camp tunnelled in amongst the bracken fern was ideal for concealing where you were from others. The fern stems made pretty good arrows and spears to throw at the 'enemy'. The roots of these stems had hard pointed tips, just the thing for young fighting warriors.

Bert Hooper recalls, when as kids down the 'oller, one rainy summer we built a camp, covered it with old lino and bent sheets of corrugated iron, then dragged in an old mattress, a prize find for us kids. We all found out later though, when we had been bitten all over with itchy red spots, that our camp mattress was infested with fleas!

My good mate David Morrison, known to us kids as the 'Professor', lived a couple of doors from me. He never really mixed a great deal with us other kids too much. I always wondered why he hardly ever played down the 'oller with us. It was Bert who explained years later to me. It was only when his mother was working down at Morgan's, in Lakedale Road, did David manage to sneak out and enjoy joining in with us on our adventures, apparently, because his mother didn't allow him to play in such an uncouth place as the 'oller, and I 'spose she was quite right in her decision, when you compared

its environment to that of playing over on the Common instead.

The 'oller was also a short cut through to Roydene Road, via a bombsite. This bombsite was also a good source of bricks, to stack and build huts with. These 'huts' could survive sustained heavy bombing attacks from the big clods of turf and bricks pieces being flung at you during the many wars us kids enacted, often very vigorously, against each other.

The lower end of the 'oller was where the public air raid shelters were once situated during WWII. These were accessed via a flight of concrete stairs from Sladedale Road, all these now long gone. In this area was a patch of shrubs where a plant called 'Jack Wood' grew. It was a bamboo plant. We'd cut it and make peashooters from the hollow stems. The 'peas' we used for 'ammo' came from an elderberry plant that grew nearby. We would fill our mouths with the tiny unripe green elderberry fruit and rapidly fire them at each other through these homemade peashooters. They could sting your legs when hit from close range! (Although these homemade peashooters were not nearly as powerful as the all-metal peashooters we bought from the Home & Colonial Store near the Plumstead Fire Station, where we also bought a bag of hard yellow peas to use as ammo' as well.)

This elderberry bush would produce creamy white flowers in the summer that eventually ripened into the juicy dark blue elderberries. I collected the tiny caterpillars that fed on this plant and kept them in a large jam jar where they would spin cocoons and emerge as a small black and white spotted Tiger moth. I would then release them at this stage, back into to the elderberry bush.

I collected many kinds and types of insects from the 'oller. One time I dug up a lot of brown shiny cocoons. I put them in one of my jars and not long after this I had a jar teeming with blue bottle flies! Without thinking I took the lid off the jar and soon had a room full of large buzzing flies! I loved studying insects and the 'oller was a good hunting ground. I had quite a few jars in my bedroom with live specimens in. One day I was in the living room. I had a jar containing wood lice (slaters). I was looking at the way the females carried the tiny hatched babies around, all clinging to the underside of their bodies. The vicar, who was from St Patrick's, was on one of his visits, came in and whilst having a cup of tea he asked me what I had in the jar and innocently I said, "I've got some lice in the jar" My mother suddenly became quite agitated and gruffly told me to go outside and play. It puzzled me why she was grumpy with me.



*David (professor) Morrison, aged 10, & Charlie Reed, aged 8, Sladedale Rd. c.1954.*

The 'oller was where we often played hide and seek, hiding in the long grass and

amongst the many small shrubs that grew down there. The 'oller was where we rolled the infamous tyre\* down into the back garden with such terrible results.

The 'oller, was where I found a stolen hand bag and purse and another time a battered stolen Wrigley's chewing gum machine. This yellow Wrigley's machine was found by me one morning whilst foraging down the 'oller. There it was, all bent and battered, and broken open, lying in the long grass, minus the packets of chewing gum and the money. I told my mum and dad, who contacted the police. Shortly after a copper came and collected it. I remember him riding off on his bicycle with the machine wedged sideways on his rear carrier. Such were the thrills of the wee Common kids, yes indeed. The 'oller, where one day I found a whole pound note stuck in the base of the fence! The 'oller, where we learnt about the differences 'tween boys and girls! The 'oller, where I fell in the stinging nettle patch wearing only short trousers and a sloppy Joe. I was covered from head to toe in tingling red bumps from all the stings. I got home very distressed and mum blotched pink Calamine lotion all over my body with cotton wool. The fragrant smelling lotion was so cool and soothing on all of those stinging itchy spots. If we got stung as kids by nettles a cure was to rub the sting with Dock leaves to relieve thee sting.



*The 'oller, (This is where the Public Air Raid Shelters were situated during WWII, on the left fenced off part by the end house), Sladedale Road, looking down from junction of Goldsmid Road, (It was on this is spot where the mobile anti-aircraft gun unit positioned itself during air raids in WWII.) \*See story: Dick (Cyril) Dixey Remembers. Photo c1997 Albert (Bert) Hooper.*

The 'oller was where you could run and hide when your parents were angry with you when you were in trouble. The 'oller, where the 'two drunken tea leaves'\* giggled as they lay in the bracken until the sun went down.

The 'oller has a row of houses built on two thirds of it now (2007). Only a small part remains of this once well utilised play area. So much enjoyed during that era when kids played

outside, often all day long. When there was hardly a television set to be found in a home and long before the Play Stations and computers of today's 'static' indoor generation of kids.

Nowadays the remaining bit of the original 'oller is well overgrown by shrubs and tangled undergrowth. It has become a small area where nature has been allowed to re-establish itself. There are now foxes that live and breed there, raising their fox cubs.

Elizabeth Downey, who now lives at my old house in Sladedale Road, says, "We often get foxes wandering into



*The fox and the cat sunbathing on back garden shed, 71 Sladedale Road. Photo: Elizabeth Downey.*

our back garden. The fox in the photo is sunbathing on the roof of the garden shed at the bottom of our garden. He and the cat were having a Mexican stand off. For a time we thought he may have been injured or was protecting some cubs, but he just lay there all day, dozing in the sun. Later in the day he got up, stretched, and went off into the night! We get loads of foxes on the road; they have dens on the scrubland opposite the house (the 'oller). We hear the cubs squawking at night. They're very bold, strolling around even during the day without a care in the world!"

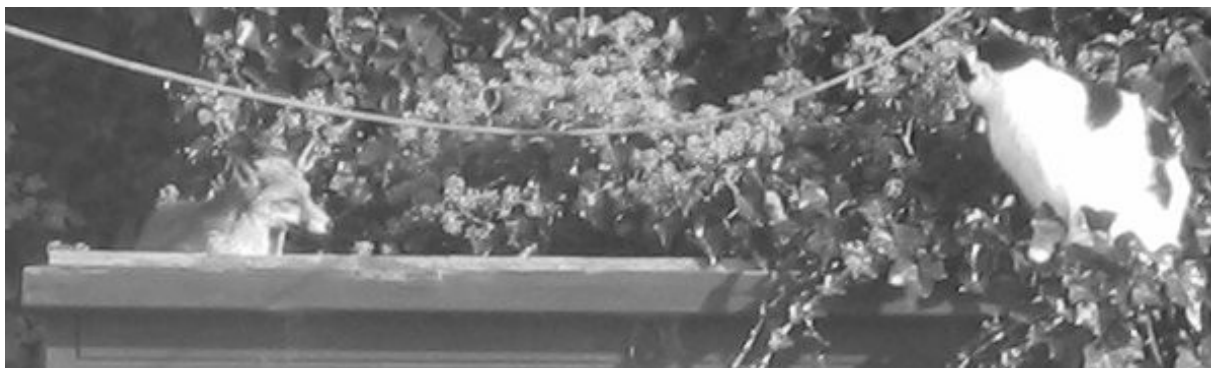
It's so nice to know that the 'oller, as such, is still a playground where future young inhabitants still play, just as us Common kids had done so many years before them.

2007.

*See stories:*

*\*'A Rolling Tyre Gathers Much Mischief*

*\*\*Two Drunken Tea Leaves*



*Close up of the Fox, on the left, and the cat on the right.*

# Goldie Leigh Hospital

## A Brief History

Location: Lodge Hill, Abbey Wood.

The name Goldie Leigh was probably derived from the 'Leigh Family of Addington' in Surrey who owned the Manor of East Wickham during the reign of Elizabeth 1st and up to 1737. Some of the family lived at Bostall Heath and eventually united with a local family called 'Goldie' whose residence was situated in what later became the hospital grounds.

The buildings were established by the Woolwich Board of Guardians to house the orphans of the neighbourhood. In 1914 the houses were taken over by the Metropolitan Asylums Board as a hospital for children suffering from contagious diseases of the skin. London County Council expanded the hospital so that by 1938 it had 248 beds, a school with 5 classrooms, a craft room and a large hall for long-stay patients.

The hospital maintained its own Guide, Brownie, Scout and Cub Pack.

In 1939 on the outbreak of war the corridors were made into air raid shelters. Part of the premises became an Auxiliary Fire Service station and the male staff formed its own company of the Home Guard. The children were evacuated when V-2 rockets bombed the area.



*Grounds of the hospital, date c1968.  
Photo courtesy Mr R. Leng.*



*Entrance, Goldie Leigh Hospital.*

*Photograph courtesy of Dr J. D.*

*Johnston & Miss S. Etheridge. Dated  
April 2001.*

In 1961 as a result of the declining need for hospital treatment of skin conditions a decision was made to admit children who were mentally subnormal and the Bostall Unit was modified to meet the needs of 52 children. The hospital was kept open as a hostel for children with disabilities until 1988. Goldie Leigh Hospital is now (April 2001) run as an outpatient service for patients in need of physiotherapy, occupational therapy and psychiatric assistance.

*Story courtesy of: The Greenwich Heritage Society.*

# *Growing Up In The Prefab Days On Winn's Common*

*Jill Bell, nee Lee, and her elder sister Wendy, recalls living in the prefab community*

My family, Mr and Mrs LS.Lee, lived at 58 Winn's Common, in the prefab village. Our next door neighbours were the lovely couple Mr and Mrs Wilfred Nichols and they had a son called Billy who we played with. Mrs Nichols moved to 30 Eynsham Drive in Abbey Wood but we never heard about her after our family moved up to Lancaster where my father got a job. I thoroughly enjoyed living in the prefab community and I was very upset to move away, even though I was only about seven at the time. Mr Nichols used to come over and do magic tricks for us, it was very exciting. We didn't see much of our dad during the week as he worked in the Regent Street Poly and had to teach in the evenings and during the day, so it was good to see Mr Nichols occasionally. My sister and I played with a gang of kids who hurled around the estate on their bikes.



*Mum & dad and us in our prefab garden 58 Winn's Common. Jill age three & Wendy seven 1949.*

My father, Southam Lee, grew rhubarb and my mother, Lillian, used to hope that the milkman's horse would stop outside our house and drop the "manure" right outside so she could run out with a bucket and spade to put it on the rhubarb. There seemed to be a lot of friendly rivalry between neighbours as to where the horse would stop and do the business! There was almost a ripple of excitement in the air when the milkman appeared!

My sister and I went to Timbercroft School, me in the infants and she in the juniors. We had very cold outdoor toilets there and I was quite scared to run across the playground in case I bumped into the caretaker, for no good reason I was scared of him. I used to be sent out by my teacher, Miss Painter in the first infants class, to find out what time it was on the old outdoor clock. By the time I ran back, the numbers had fallen out of my brain and I'd have to run out again and try again! Not much difference now!! I remember my mother had food rationing coupons to spend at the corner shop on the way to and from school and I dreaded



going past it on the way back from school because my mother would gossip with neighbours for what seemed like hours.

*Jill & Wendy and our dolls 1949.*

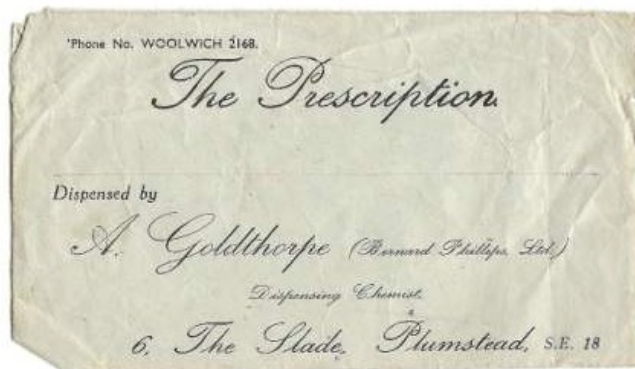
The interiors of the prefabs were lovely, with a big kitchen, two bedrooms and a sitting room. I remember that a lot of the kitchen surfaces were a shiny metal. That was where my mother tried out a vacuum cleaner for the very first time when a travelling salesman knocked at the door. I don't think she bought it. I also remember a gypsy woman who come round to sell pegs. My mother went to fetch her purse. Mum told me to "Watch the woman" but I didn't know what to do when the woman started to look through the kitchen drawers. Luckily nothing was taken but I never told my mother what I saw. I would have got into trouble for not shouting and not telling her.



*Me, Jillian Lee, left, and my sister, Wendy Lee, right, at the Winn's Common Coronation Party in 1953. We are both wearing our commemorative badges that celebrated the Coronation. I was aged seven and my sister eleven.*

I remember that whenever I got a sore throat I was forced to take an evil tasting medicine. This medicine had the foulest taste imaginable and it dried up your tongue with a metallic taste and it smelt disgusting, I imagined it was like drinking strong donkey urine! In those days doctors used to write down the ingredients of a medicine and patients would take it to a pharmacist who would then make up the prescription. In recent years I have asked local pharmacists if they were able to make it up from the prescription but they say it would be against the law to do that. I had an almost morbid fascination to be able to relive the awful experience of smelling and taking it. The medicine was called 'Gargle and Swallow' which is

indeed what I did, far too many times. I actually dreaded getting a sore throat but that prescription followed us around like a leach and it just wouldn't get lost, not ever!



The Doctor's prescription (Dr Francis Wright, 44 Conway Road) and the pharmacist's envelope (A Goldthorpe, 6 The Slade) for the dreaded 'Gargle & Swallow' sore throat treatment, dated 8-8-1942.

I also remember the big smogs in London in 1952 when I was four. My mother took me shopping by bus to what I presume was Plumstead High Street. I liked catching the bus home from there because a dry cleaners (I think) next to the bus stop kept a lot of eggs in the window with a red light shining on them to keep them warm. Every so often the chicks would hatch and we'd see them scampering all over on the surface just by the window. I have no idea what the shop did with them. At the same bus stop in December 1952 during that smog my mother and I were waiting for a bus to take us home and I put my hand directly in front of my face and I couldn't see it for the thick smog. The air was thick with the foul smog. I marvelled at how my mother could catch the right bus home even though visibility was just about nil. (I don't know how on earth the bus driver could see!) I couldn't see anything except blackness. When we got home and blew our noses the handkerchief was black! Thank goodness there are no more smogs like those any more.

You can see in the photos that there were no hedges between neighbours, just wire fences, which made it feel more like a community and we could all see what was going on around us. The prefabs look small but for us they were just right.



At the seaside with our father at Rustington.

Both my parents liked to dress smartly and it now seems very odd that my father was paddling in the sea dressed in a suit or at best a jacket and tie and everyday flannels.



*Here's all the family in the back garden of No 58.*

*We are not dressed especially for the photo. We were just expected to look smart. My mother was called Lillian Lee and my father was Southam Lee. This was taken in 1948 when I was two and a half and my sister was six. My father was then 35 and my mother was 38. She was a 'stay at home mum' at that time and my father was a Lecturer in Engineering at Regent Street Poly.*



*Me, aged three and a half, standing outdoors in my pyjamas in 1949.*

*You can see the corrugated walls and the studs we used to pick out are at the centre of the black circles, on the right hand side of me on the wall.*

My sister, Wendy Lee, recalls some memories of living on Winn's Common in the late 1940's and early 1950's and says "As for Winn's Common, Mrs Nicholls, our next door neighbour, had two sons, Billy and Keith. I can't remember which one I asked to marry me!

The rag and bone man used to come round on his horse and cart calling out "rag an' bones" in a very distinctive tone, also shouting out, "Any old iron" as he collected unwanted metal items for scrap, he also sharpened knives and scissors. Sometimes he'd offer a goldfish in a plastic bag instead of money in exchange for the items.

Other regular visitors were the coal man and the milk man on their horse and carts. The coal man carried the sacks of coal into the coal shed along the path at the side of the prefab. I used to practise roller skating along that path and used the shed door to help me stop. One day, the shed door was left open and I went sailing straight on into the coal pile!

The soil in the garden was solid clay and good for roses. I remember mum rushing out to shovel the manure as soon as the milkman's horse had deposited it. My sister and I played with the clay and kneaded into little figures, which we would then bake in the oven.

The prefab had lots of very small black Bakelite studs, fillers of some kind, fitted in the walls of the prefab. We used to pick them out from all of the prefabs outside walls. My sister put one in her ear and we had to go by bus to hospital to get it out. On another occasion, when aged about five, she sewed through her finger nail while using the Singer sewing machine. The needle went right through to the other side so Mum had to unscrew the needle from the machine and took my sister to Great Ormond Street Hospital with the needle still stuck right through to the other side! She was fine after it was removed.

I remember the prefabs were unbearably hot at night in the summer and sometimes and we couldn't sleep. When the family returned from a holiday in Rustington, the whole house had been infested with earwigs. They came tumbling out of cupboards and drawers and also the towels and the aprons hanging in the kitchen.

In the winter we had the coal fire in the living room, which we all huddled round and froze when we went to bed, but soon warmed up again tucked up in our bed in our flannelette pyjamas and hot water bottle with lots of blankets and thick eiderdown.



*Jill playing outside with her doll's cot 1949.*

My sister and I learned to ride our bikes in the quiet streets around the prefabs. We raced round the roads and the round patch of grass next to our house. I fell off my bike once but I didn't cry... until I got back on the other side of the roundabout.

I ventured further into the prefab estate when I had to deliver flowers from our school for the family of a girl who had died of TB as I lived the nearest to her prefab. We were quite safe to walk to school by ourselves because we only had to cross King's Highway road, which wasn't very busy then days, and then walk to Timbercroft School.

I remember the Coronation Street Party held on the prefab estate in 1953. There was a talent competition that I won for playing a Beethoven piano sonata, all from memory.

I was also on track to win the egg and spoon race but I lost my lead when I tripped near the winning post and I came in third. I still have these certificates somewhere.

Well, that was all a long time ago.”  
(2009)



# *Growing Up In The Prefabs On Winn's Common*

*Roger Small*

I grew up a resident of the prefabs on Winn's Common and have many happy memories of growing up there and in Plumstead and Woolwich. My maternal grandfather was a blacksmith wheelwright and farrier who had a forge in Chapel Hill near the gates of the Woolwich Dockyard.

I went to Timbercroft Primary School. My first year class was in, I think, 1951. The teacher's name was Mrs Farley. I was in Mr Seabrook's class for a while, in the second year of the junior school, which would have made the year 1952, possibly.



*Timbercroft Primary School, my first year class (1951?)*

*Top row: John Bromley, Graham Bitmead, Kenneth Farrer, Robert Jackson, Alan Reed, Vivien Porter, Michael Cass, Richard Gaskin, Pamela Calhoun, Gillian Hampson, Jean Archer, Roger Small.*

*2nd row: Brian Watling, Dawn Egan, Vivien Parry, Pauline Willmoth, Dorothy Miller, Denise Prosser, Pamela Perry, Mavis Skinner, Sylvia Figes, Carol Guard, Terence Houghton, David Millett, Bernard Maclean.*

*3rd row: Jaqueline Wiffen, Richard Hamilton, David Griffiths, Peter Harding, Michael Pinney, Can't recall, Christine Burgess, Irene Tozer, Leslie Ellis, Bruce Denny.*

*Front row: Josephine Mortimer, Irene Bartlett, Lesley Hunter, Rosemary Badcock, Jennifer Howard, Jean Harris, Hazel Jones, Can't recall.*



*Timbercroft School Journey to Broadstairs in May 1951. The motor coach that transported the school party to Broadstairs is pictured parked just outside the school gate on Flaxton Road looking towards King's Highway.*



*The two teachers in charge were Mr Monk and Miss Bennett. Mr Monk was a very jolly character and was very popular with the children.*

*The school party on the steps of the guesthouse (Merrivale?) in Broadstairs. Mr Monk and Miss Bennett are standing in the left foreground. Mr Seabrook is standing about halfway up the steps. The lady and the man in the white jacket, standing to the right of the steps, were the proprietors of the guesthouse. The man on the extreme right was, I believe, a teacher but I cannot recall his name. My brother, Christopher Small, is standing close to the top of the steps at the junction of the portico and the brickwork.*



My headmaster at Timbercroft was Mr Huggins. I remember him as an

authoritarian figure but someone who was nevertheless very kindly to his charges. The fourth year of junior school found me in the class of Mrs Prudhoe. I seem to remember someone telling me that she was Mr Huggins' sister. Mrs Prudhoe was a strict but much loved teacher.

As a child I lived at No 82 Winn's Common. This prefab was situated on an unnamed road, which opened onto what is now Bleak Hill Lane. My brother and I were very fortunate in the sense that most of the families who lived on our street had male children. As a relatively large group of boys we had many adventurous times playing on Winn's Common. The names of families who lived on our side of the road were; Nay (Barry and Melvyn), Buttery (James), Small (Christopher and Roger), Harrison (Michael), unknown, Hunt (Peter), Young (Kenneth). The names of families who lived on the other side of the road were Macintosh? (John), Hammond (David), MacNamara, Battison (Jack and Frank), Green (John and Martin),

Whiffen (Jacqueline).

In the picture below, featuring children around a motorcycle, the boy on the left is Roderick. The boys sitting on the motorcycle are Christopher and Roger Small. The other children are John Green and Jacqueline Whiffen. A pig bin is visible at the end of the traffic island. Bleak Hill Lane is in the far distance.



In the second picture below, the children are sitting in the garden of 83 Winn's Common. They are Michael Harrison and me, Roger Small. The Winn's Common round barrow was located a little way behind the prefab in the centre foreground.

**1st LOOK**  
Look at your whites. If you've washed them in Persil, you'll see how much whiter they are! A clean, true, WHITE white. That's Persil-white! Yes, Persil washes whiter because it washes cleaner.

**2nd LOOK**  
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See how bright Persil washes your coloureds, how it keeps woollens soft, fine things fresh and clean.

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# *Growing Up In The Prefab Village On Winn's Common*

*Barbara Rosam (nee Biddle)*

It was good growing up in the prefabs on Winn's Common. I am now 58 \*(2005). My brother Joey and I (that's us in the picture) lived at 46 Winn's Common, by the bus stop where the 53 buses used to stop, before going down King's Highway to Plumstead Bus Garage.



*Barbara Biddle and Brother Joey*

We were the first prefab in our turning, (they had no names), it was a strange shape. Straight for about four prefabs and ballooned out with a grass circle in the middle, it then narrowed and went straight again to the road called Winn's Common Road (although I was never aware it had a name at all). All the prefabs had their own gardens. Ours had a corrugated iron shed which coal was kept in (an old Anderson air raid shelter). We had a pull-down table in the small kitchen; on winter mornings the oven rings were on full and our clothes would be placed around to warm them. We would eat our breakfast sitting round the oven. We had a bathroom but when it was very cold we bathed in a tin bath in front of the fire.



*The Ascension Hall and School. C1900.*

There was a church hall right at the top of Lakedale Road, at an odd sort of angle (\*The Ascension Hall, long demolished). The paddling pool is still there, but the sand has been replaced with volleyball. We used to jump from one concrete block to the next and spent many happy hours every summer there.

Next door to us were Esme and George Smith with their children: Ena, Barry and Pam. Our back garden met with Roy and Eve Gillmore's; they lived at number 61 with their children Barry and Jennifer (who were born there).

We all moved to Kingsdale Road when the prefabs were pulled down in 1958. We became lifetime friends and Barry and his wife Maureen went on to become my daughter's godparents.



*Happy kids in their prefab garden, Winn's Common early 1950's.*

The housing estate where we moved to in Kingsdale Road was originally the land that was Clubbies' Pig Farm.

I met up again with three old friends who lived in the prefabs, via the \*'Friends Reunited' web site: Malcolm Freeman who lived at number 103, Lynda Martin and Helen Holt.

Characters such as Pat and Lance Spencer lived in our section of the street with their children: Johnny, and his two sisters, whose names escape me now. They were the "Del Boy" family of the time. (Aunty) Pat had jet-black hair; I never saw her without her make-up. Long, long finger nails (real). A very glamorous lady who used to tell us children very scary stories about witches and frighten us to death. Lance was tall and blonde. He used to get up to all sorts and always had something that had "fell off the back of a lorry." There was also Mr and Mrs Abbott and their daughter Valerie. Mr Abbott was a postman.

Maggie and George Gardner lived opposite from them. Well known in the area, the Gardner family were also a "character family". They had Ronnie and Jean.

My aunt Liz and uncle George Knowles lived in the next alleyway to us at No 24. They had two daughters, Pam and Carol. Carol and husband Ray had a sweet shop in Wickham Lane in the 1970s/80s. In fact, the shop belonged to my uncle and aunt before them, George and Doll Biddle. When I was a child Mrs Sargent owned this shop.

I remember the knife grinder man coming round on his bike with a box on the front calling out "Bring out your knives." Also the man selling winkles and shrimps. We always had winkles and shrimps for tea on Sunday.

High days and holidays were when my uncles and aunts would come for Sunday lunch



*My dad, Joe Biddle.*



*Happy families, Prefabs, Winn's Common around 1953'ish  
Smith, Joey & myself, Kathleen, Faithful and my dad Joe.*

and/or tea. They lived in Camberwell (where my mother came from). My nan moved from there to Wickham Lane when my mum was about 14. (My granddad was a Black Cab taxi driver from Camberwell. (He died of shrapnel wounds he received in World War 1, in June 1947, when I was a day old.) Sundays we either went out to tea or had visitors coming. We were all very family orientated those days. My brother and I went to Sunday School at the Evangelist Church, Plumstead Common Road, near the Woodman Pub. I was in the Junos and my brother the Cubs. You had to go to Sunday School to participate.



*Bus Garage, corner of Plumstead Lane and King's Highway. In use from 1913 to 1980.  
(now demolished)*

When my aunt and uncle were over one weekend from Debden in Essex (where they had moved from Camberwell), with my cousins Harry and John, we went up to the woods past the football pitch and John fell down a bank and landed in the back garden of a house in Wickham Lane. A man came out to him who had first aid knowledge and called an ambulance. John had broken his leg. Oh, the furore that it caused. We all got the blame! He was in St Nicholas Hospital; his parents lived in Essex, which caused huge problems in those days.

On the rare occasions my mum and dad went out, when we had visitors, we went to the Plumstead Common Working Men's Club. Us children could go as well, as they had a children's room with a TV and the gardens to play in during the summer.

My mum and dad Joe and Grace were bus conductors at Plumstead Garage, (situated then in King's Highway) for many years. We went to the coast most Sundays in the summer with the Plumstead Bus Garage. They had outings for staff and families every weekend; these were a joy, and I often remember climbing back up King's Highway in the evening, tired and sunburnt.

I remember when my cousin Peter Hall was 21. He was in the navy and had his 21st birthday party in our prefab. Dad took down the wall between the living room and bedroom. On the bedroom side were cupboards. He used to take them down and lay them on their side and they were used as benches to sit on. Several of Peter's sailor friends came and stayed for the weekend.

In the school holidays we used to go to Sutcliffe Park to play. We would take fish paste sandwiches and some lemonade. There would be a group of us and apart from warnings about crossing the road; there was nothing else to worry about in those days. We used to play in the woods by the football pitches. I remember sleeping out in our prefab garden in a tent: my brother, Barry Smith and myself. Mrs Smith (Esme) cooked us an egg and bacon



*Barbara and neighbour Tommy Little*

flan, and my dad kept coming out during the night to make sure we were OK.

We went to Purrett Road School, which became Gallions Mount. The teacher I remember best was Miss Branch; she married a boy from the Turrett House, at the top of the Hill. The family were Greek Cypriots. In fact she contacted me once, via \*'Friends Reunited'. She lives in Cyprus since she retired and is Mrs Papacarambus. Other popular teachers: Mr and Mrs Bannister, Mr Clark, Deputy Head and Mr Edwards, Head teacher. There was also a very strict red haired teacher, but we all liked him. (Mr Stevens?)



*Lovely grub at the party..*

My mum used to feed the demolition men who came to pull the prefabs down. They used to spend a lot of time in our prefab; dad became quite friendly with them. They were brothers and they came from Norfolk.

The Coronation party was held on the piece of common opposite our prefab. There was a wooden hall (Baptist Hall) there where I went to Junos. The tables were set out in long lines. There were races; my brother won the sack race. There was fancy dress for the boys and girls. I was dressed as the Queen and my brother and cousin John Hall were pages and carried my long train.



*Barbara as the Queen with brother Joey and cousin John as pages holding the train.*

I remember the Ravine Café and Kibb's the greengrocers shop. Once I was sent to Kibb's shop for something with a ten-shilling note and when I got there I didn't have it! It was in my hand so I must have dropped it on the way. That was a lot of money in those days, and I still remember how awful I felt. The shops were where Swingate Lane met King's Highway. On the corner of Flaxton Road was Edward's Newsagents, the same Edward's that were off the Beresford Square. Then, a few terraced houses on, was Kibb's, which was on the end terrace; so they covered the side access and made it into a veggie shop. Further along on the end was a general store/post office. (Still there today. 2007)

I'm afraid we were quite boring and never really got into any trouble. I remember my mum and dad were fined once because our dog chased a policeman on his

bicycle, snapping at his feet all the way!

My dad, Joe Biddle, whose family had a fish stall in the market in Beresford Square. (See the sign on J. Biddle's stall in the picture below of Beresford Square)

There are very few original traders there now. Denise Dearsley is a friend of my cousin Carol. I

remember the Carpenters, Dennards, Delieu, Dearsley, Goddard and Edwards who were all well known traders. (See: *Woolwich Market, A Brief History.*)

\*Chris Kitchenham adds: At the end of Barbara (nee Biddle) Rosam's story, she mentions the Biddle Fish Stall (which I remember) and the 'Carpenters' as some of the few remaining original traders of Beresford Square. Mr and Mrs Carpenter were our neighbours in High Grove and I had the opportunity to chat with them and introduce them to our son and daughter-in-law when we were visiting in 2000.



*Coronation party for the prefab folk, Winn's Common 1953.*



*Biddle's fish stall sign is on left of photo.*



*Granddad Biddle at his fish stall.*

\*Friends Reunited site: [www.friendsreunited.co.uk](http://www.friendsreunited.co.uk)

# *Harry's Nine Lives*

*Harry Max Goldstein,*

*aged 86 (November 2005)*

## WARTIME MEMORIES

During the Second World War I was in the army for 5 years 3 months, from October 1940. I did not enlist at the beginning of the war as I was a self employed Builders' Merchant and so was given a year to make the necessary arrangements for the business before being 'called-up'.



*Harry, right, with his brother Louis, 1941.*

I started out as Rifleman 6852725 attached to the Kings Royal Rifles, later becoming an acting Lance Corporal. I was stationed just outside Winchester in Hampshire. At one point when the camp was bombed I was faced with dead fellow soldiers surrounding me, one of several times when I narrowly escaped death myself.

I remember one day when a notice went up in the barracks in Chiseldon, just outside Salisbury, asking for anyone who could ride a motorbike. Myself and another soldier, Nobby Clark, volunteered our services though neither of us had any experiences of motorbikes; we thought there might be something more interesting for us to do and indeed this was the case.

Having virtually taught ourselves the ins and outs of the motorbike and doffed our crash helmets and khaki canvas rucksacks, we became despatch riders. At this point we were stationed at Bulford in Wiltshire. We would report to a military office each day where we were given a route for the day where we were to deliver our precious dispatches, many labelled 'Top Secret'. One of the destinations was Wilton House, where I understand in recent years, coincidentally, a despatch rider's bike has been on show.

I was then transferred to my hometown of Woolwich in South East London, where, having served as an infantryman, I then became a gunner in the Royal Artillery, stationed in the Academy building. I became very familiar with that building as, officially being known as a glazier, I was more than once given the task of replacing the glass panes in the windows of the Academy when they were blown out during bombing raids. Naturally, this area suffered greatly during the Blitz, as down the road was the famous Woolwich Arsenal, a prime target for the enemy.

Another occasion when I nearly lost my life was when I was on my bicycle going from my shop on Plumstead Common to my barracks. A bomb fell, almost turning over a tram, and I was tossed off my bicycle. I really felt I lived the proverbial 'nine lives' during the war!

*WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at [bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](http://bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar)*

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# *Head's Greengrocers Ancestry*

*Mark Head*

## *HEADS THE GREENGROCERS, LAKEDALE ROAD.*

The Head family was very widespread in Plumstead, Woolwich, Erith and Abbey Wood, stemming from the 'immigration' of John Headd, (often spelt in this way) a gunner from Southampton who, after serving in the Napoleonic Wars in the Caribbean, ended up in Woolwich Barracks. He was discharged through ill-health, after a distinguished service, and lived in the Sprays Buildings, Plumstead.

He married Sophia Smith in 1802 at St Nicholas' Church. They had many children, not all of



*This is my great grandfather, Matthew Charles Head, who was born in 1856 and lived at 19 Maxey Road, Plumstead, until he married Esther Gilbert. The marriage was at St James's, Plumstead, on Boxing Day 1881. They lived at 79, Plumstead Road.*

which are traced down the line, but their son, Stephen, married Margaret Wilkie in 1844 at St Nicholas. They all lived in Maxey Road. They also had lots of children, my great grandfather being one of them, Matthew Charles Head. He married Esther Gilbert. They lived at 79 Plumstead Road. (Esther's father was a greengrocer) Many siblings had jobs in Woolwich Arsenal or in engineering.

My grandfather married a girl up from 'real' Kent, Charing, called Ellen May Coppins. I am not certain, but I have an idea that my grandfather got into greengrocery through his grandfather George Gilbert. George Gilbert was married to Esther Kitt and they lived in Erith. Esther Kitt was related to the Kett family of Wymondham, Norfolk, and to

Robert Kett of Kett's Rebellion in 1549. My grandfather eventually owned three shops, Plumstead Road, Lakedale Road and Welling High Street.

I never have lived in or near Plumstead but my sister lives in Roydene Road. Other surviving family members live locally but I am long since out of touch, living in Lancashire.

My father seemed to have got rid of much of the past memorabilia, as he got older. He died in 2001.

# *History Of The Woolwich Free Ferry*

*D.J. Payne, C.ENG. F.I.E.E. F.C.I.B. M.B.I.M*

## *A brief history*

The right to run a ferry belongs, like the right of fair or market, to the class of rights called 'English law franchises'. Its origins must be by statute, royal grant or prescription. The owner of the ferry need not be the owner of the land on either side of the water, but he is bound to maintain safe boats and employ fit persons as ferrymen. In return, he can charge tolls and has a right of action against those who disturb his franchise or diminish his custom by setting up a new ferry.

From very early on, when Woolwich was just a little fishing village, the people of Woolwich had the right to run a ferry. This was perhaps the more necessary since part of the parish of Woolwich lies on the northern side of the river, an outpost of Kent in what would logically have been Essex, and an anomaly which is probably a survival from early ecclesiastical parish groupings. The Abbey of Lessness or Westwood, in the parish of Erith, founded in 1178, was granted several parishes and manors in Essex, by Henry II and Edward I. In later centuries the parish Abbots caused scandals by appropriating even more land by rather questionable means.

The ferry at Woolwich ran between North Woolwich and Warren Lane on the south shore. There is an early written reference to it in the state papers of 1308, when the waterman conducting the ferry, William de Wicton, sold his business and a house, to William Atte, a mason, for £10. It may be that this ferry was a descendant of the one from which the abbey was receiving dues in the previous century. In 1320, the ferry changed hands again, and twenty years later, several acres of land, the ferry and rent in Woolwich were conveyed by William and Mary Filliol to Thomas Harold and his heirs for 100 silver marks.

In 1320, the people of Woolwich petitioned Parliament to suppress the ferries at Greenwich and Erith, because Woolwich ferry was a "Royal Ferry" favoured of the king. This probably means that it was an appurtenance of the Royal manor of Eltham, the equivalent of today's Sandringham.

There is no further mention of the ferry during the years in which Woolwich rose to prominence as a Royal dockyard under the reign of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I.

Pepys tells of journeying, with his friends, using other ferries up and down the Thames, but he does not mention the Woolwich ferry. He does however speak disapprovingly of the sinking of ships across the Thames at that point as a blockade against the Dutch. Pepys thought it would have been more sensible to fit out these same ships as Men-o-War.

An ordnance depot established at Woolwich during Henry VIII's reign became in time, the Royal Arsenal, and as London grew bigger and busier, the movement of troops and supplies became a problem. So in 1810, the army established its own ferry, which went from the T pier in front of the Arsenal, to Duvall's Point (the old barge house landing site) on the northern bank.

In 1811 the act of parliament was passed for the purposes of establishing a ferry across the Thames at Woolwich, from the old ballast or sand wharf, which was opposite Chapel St (now Chapel Hill) where the dockyard then terminated. This was to be a common ferry consisting of one or more boats or such other vessels as shall be sufficient and proper for the passage or conveyance of persons, cattle, carriages, goods, wares and merchandise over the said river Thames. The shareholders of this company, which called itself the Woolwich Ferry Company, included among others, the lady of the manor, Dame Jane Wilson, her son, Sir Thomas Maryon Wilson, John Long and John Stride.

The waiting rooms on either bank eventually became public houses. The Marquise of Wellington on the south bank, and the Prince Regent on the north. Both public houses have long since been swallowed up in the dockyard, though the Prince Regent probably stood somewhere in the area of the present Prince Regent's Wharf.

Plans of the Bowater estate dated 1820 show an old road from Eltham leading to the Marquise of Wellington, marked "To The Horse Ferry".

The minute book of the Waterman's company show that the watermen of Woolwich were very dissatisfied with the monopoly given to the Western Ferry by the 1811 act. The position of the Western Ferry was stated to be half a mile from the town, and its promoters asserted that it did not prejudice the inhabitants of Woolwich or the watermen, but since there was a penalty of 40 shillings. (Increased to £5 in the 1815 amendment) imposed on anyone carrying any person, carriage, beast or chattel over the water within half a mile of it, the watermen petitioned for, and obtained a repeal of the act in 1816.

However, the Western Ferry continued to run until 1844, when the company was dissolved after a history of inept management and general confusion. The thousands of pounds raised by shares and mortgages seem to have been swallowed up in unprofitable expenditure. There is no mention, in the accounts, of revenue derived from the working of the ferry, which was after all the company's chief business.

Also, no dividends were distributed to the company's unfortunate shareholders.

As its rivals fortunes grew worse, the Barge House Ferry, at the old Warren Lane crossing, took heart and prospered. In 1838 we read:

'The lessees of Woolwich ferry have within the last few weeks stationed here a new ferry boat of larger dimensions than any on the river, with a view to meeting the increase of traffic that has lately taken place between the two counties. Mr Hose, the proprietor of the 'Old Barge House' is constructing an esplanade extending along the banks of the river, 300 yards, the depths upwards of 130 foot.'

Later the greater part of this esplanade was incorporated in the Royal Victoria Gardens, which still exist to this day. This ferry had at one time floated a public company that proved that it had from time immemorial conveyed men, cattle and goods across to north Woolwich from Warren Lane. About 1810, it was owned by one "John Bull", and after him it was worked by "John Punter". The ferry later passed into the hands of John Fulford, a lighterman, who also became proprietor of the Barge House Hotel.

In 1846, the Great Eastern Railway Company built its Thames Wharf branch. It was

planned as a freight line, but at an early stage, some of its promoters realised how easy their line could be extended along the riverbank to the old ferry house, which crossed the river at Woolwich. Two steam ferries were built at Barking in 1847 and ran in connection with the London trains. Later, a third boat was added and they were named, the 'Essex, Middlesex and Kent'.

From 1850 onwards there were proposals for superseding the ancient horse raft of Woolwich ferry by a steam vessel, the prevailing idea being a flat-bottomed boat grounding on the beach. There was no movement on this proposal until thirty years later, when the existing means of crossing the river were rapidly becoming inadequate. In October 1880 a public meeting was held in Woolwich to see whether the parish could afford to set up its own steam ferry and a deputation of 60 townfolk waited on the local board.

However the cost of building the boats and landings proved too great and representations were then made to the Metropolitan Board of Works, forerunner of the GLC. The people of Woolwich pointed out that their rates had helped to pay for the toll bridges in west London, which the board had recently bought and opened to free public use, and suggested that they should be able to cross the Thames free of charge



*Woolwich Ferry South Terminal c.1925.*

*Photo: Greenwich Heritage Centre.*



*South side ferry approach, vessel is the John Benn.*



*"Will Crooks"*

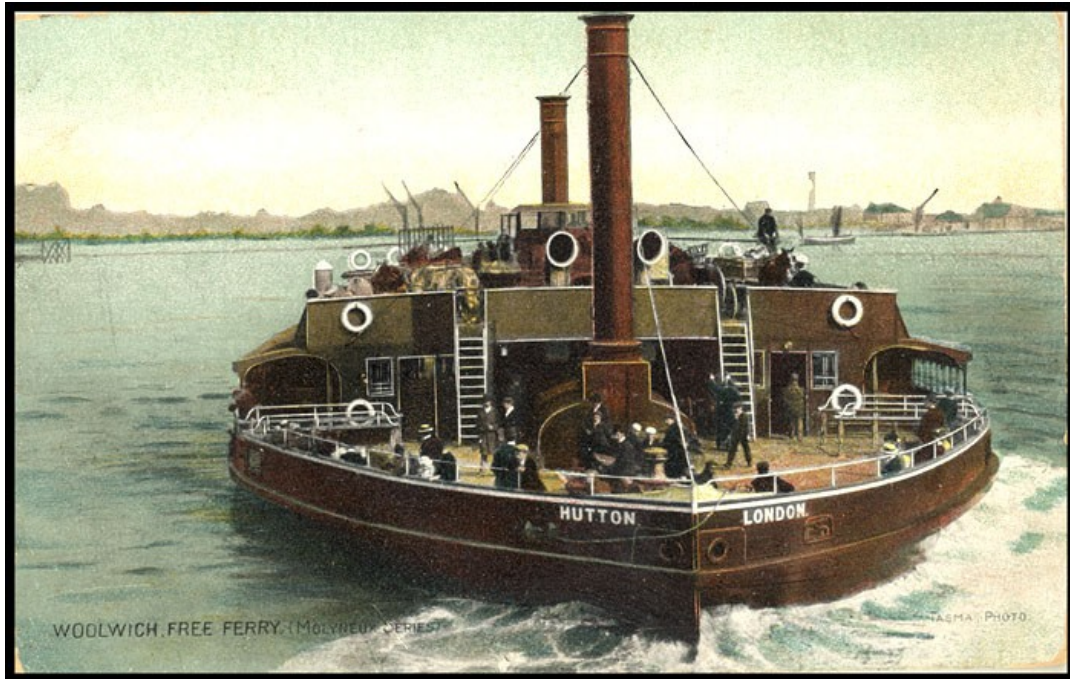
*The "Duncan"*



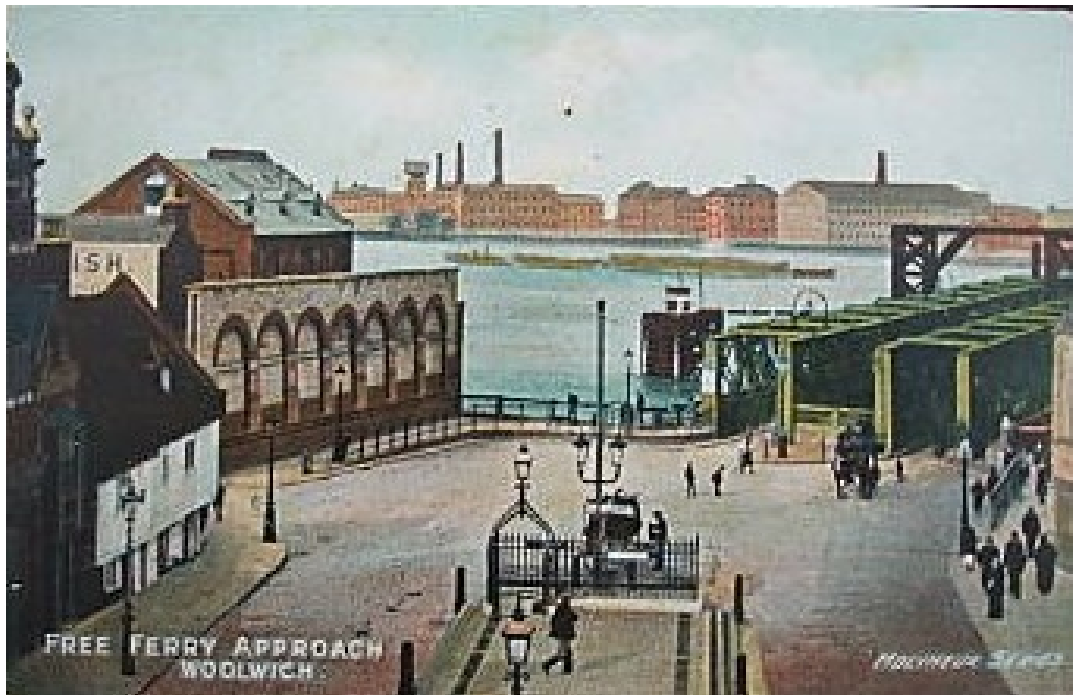
*The "Gordon"*



*Ferry Ernest Bevan lorry mishap.*



*Hutton*



*Early post card showing ferry approach and old houses.*

# *Home And School Life During The War Years*

*Bill Emerson*

I was aged seven when the war started and lived with my parents in Barnfield Road, Plumstead. I was attending Bloomfield Road School and I think my teacher was a Miss Kenny.

Barnfield Road was a long stretch of road with terraced two storied houses, streetlights were gas and every evening a man would ride his bicycle down the road lighting the gas mantle.

*Bill in Wales*

The first indication of war came just after Christmas 1939. My mother had taken me shopping in Plumstead High Street to a grocery shop called 'Perks' (I think) when the air raid sirens sounded. I remember my mother crying as did a number of other women. It did not mean much to me at the time.



At the end of Barnfield Road there lived the local greengrocer man. He would make a daily round of the various streets on his horse and cart selling vegetables. He was, I recall, a likeable man and he would let me ride on the cart with him for the last hundred yards or so of his round. His name was Mr Alf Maskell. It was from him that I learned the meaning of war and its implications.

In the first months of 1940 a lone German bomber flew low over the area and dropped a land mine on Barnfield Road. The explosion destroyed more than a dozen houses, killing many people and damaging many houses that became uninhabitable.

My dad managed to salvage some household furniture but most of our belongings were lost in the rubble. The AFS (Auxiliary Fire Service) covered most of the salvaged goods with tarpaulins for collection later.

My life changed quickly and dramatically. For a few days my mother and sister and I lived in a reception centre for people who had lost their homes and, in lots of cases, their families. We were sheltered and given new clothing and generally made to feel welcome while hordes of W. V. S. (Women's Voluntary Service) personnel fussed around us.

My father at this time was away finding alternative accommodation. We eventually moved into a house in Burrage Road right next to an Anglican Church. My mother joked about being safe, as we were so close to God. Diagonally opposite the house was a petrol station, which was to give us a mighty fireworks display in only a few days' time!

Bombing began in earnest and soon there were raids every night. As soon as the sirens

sounded my sister and I were put under the dining room table, a stout wooden affair which was draped with blankets to protect us from flying glass in the event of a bomb exploding close by. The house didn't last long. Soon after we moved in we were bombed again. This time the Germans were dropping incendiary bombs. Small bombs filled with a phosphorus compound, which caused fires wherever they landed. In our case it was mostly on the church roof and because of the steep pitch of the roof the



*Evacuating the children from London at the beginning of WWII.*

bombs were sliding off and landing on our house. Mother was outside with a long handled shovel picking them up and placing them on the lawn. Mother was on her own and had to call me to help because the bombs were more numerous than she could

contain. I had to help by digging up soil from the garden to smother the burning phosphorus. The petrol station had been hit and was a blazing inferno with petrol pumps exploding and spreading flaming petrol into the road and onto the adjoining-houses. The house was badly burned and once again we were back to the reception centre having again lost most of our recently acquired furnishings.

As you can imagine, schools were closed during air raids and children's education was greatly disrupted.

Following the bombing of Barnfield Road and our other house we were shocked and emotionally damaged and homeless.

Changes were made quickly and my sister was evacuated with lots of mainly younger children to a safe area in the country, far away from the city and the industrial areas.

She was placed with a couple in the town of Banbury, in Oxfordshire, where she spent the rest of the war. My father by now had been called up and he soon departed for overseas with the merchant service, sailing with the convoys of ships taking troops to Singapore and the far East bringing back food supplies to Britain on the return journey. I was to see my father again only twice in the next five years!

By this time I was attending Timbercroft School. My teacher was a Mr Rosewarne and I remember a Mr and Mrs Stanley and a Miss Nunn.

My immediate friends at school were, Duggie Hewlett, Jimmie Crabbe, George Gray, Billy Benfield and two delightful girls Violet Bishop and Barbara Potts.

Life at this time was pretty grim. There were no street lights and cars and buses had to use hooded lights showing a minimum of light in a down direction. Pavement edges were painted white to give pedestrians and traffic some guide to staying on track in the roads. All windows had to be blacked out and people using torches were instructed not to shine the light upward, for fear of attracting aircraft and bombs. Food was strictly rationed: meat, sugar, butter, cheese was allocated at the rate of four ounces per person per week. There was no regular chocolate or sweets for sale, as they were also rationed and, like all food products, could only be obtained with ration coupons. We were issued with ration books, identity cards, gas masks, which had to be carried at all times and, if you were lucky, a tin hat.

We had by this time, my mother and me, moved into a brand new house in Coombside, number 6, just over the border into Kent. It was a nice new house with a big garden and a nice ornamental iron fence at the front of the house. This was later taken by the council, along with mother's aluminium saucepans, for the war effort.

This was a rural community with plenty of open space and fields and even a small wood to play in. The air raids continued on a nightly basis and for weeks we lived underground, sleeping in the shelter and getting up in the morning to either go to work, or in my case, to school.

At Combeside my friends were Dougie Brown, Arthur Elsdon, Kenny Tribe, Joan Bowman, Dorothy MacDonald and John Spray whose dad was the local barber with a shop in Swingate Lane next to the fish and chip shop.

Even though we were now in the country we were still in south-east England, directly in the flight path of German aircraft flying from airfields in France on their way to London and the docks. The Germans had a bad habit of jettisoning their bomb load on their way back to France when they had failed to reach their target, which happened frequently. We suffered much indiscriminate bombing, which usually cost us roof tiles, windows and on one occasion, the front door. The house had windows



Bill Emerson's WWII Identity Card.

boarded up for months and for several weeks a tarpaulin covering holes in the roof. The watchword in England at this time was "Business as usual" we were not going to let the 'Jerries' get us down, according to the government propaganda machine. This was not generally the feeling of the people who had taken most of the damage.

The Battle of Britain began in August 1940, almost on my 8th birthday. To give you some idea of the intensity of these battles, which took place, on many occasions in the skies over our house, over 1733 German aircraft were shot down as against the loss of 375 pilots killed and 358 wounded of the RAF. During the next two months some 915 British aircraft were destroyed. During the daylight raids we usually received sufficient warning to be able to take cover. Still, during this period, some 1700 civilians were killed and 3360 seriously wounded. The night attacks killed many more. Some 12,581 civilians lost their lives and 16,965 were seriously injured.

One of our major problems was our proximity to a number of RAF fighter stations To the north-west of us we had West Mailing, Biggin Hill, Kenley, while to the south-east there was Lympne and Hawkinge. These were targets for enemy air strikes, both bombers and fighters, and neither of these, the Junkers 88 and the Messerschmitts, were adverse to giving civilian houses, cars and buses a squirt of machine gun fire in passing.

In August 1940 was my 8th birthday and for a special treat my mother decided we would go to town and see a film. Mother and I had a favourite place in town, Manzes' pie shop, where we could buy a big bowl of delicious pea soup and a big bread roll. They were also famous for meat pies but, conscious of the acute meat shortage, mother was always suspicious of pies and other meat products. What we really loved was the glass of warm milk that we were able to get with the meal. We went to the Grenada Cinema in Woolwich to see a Shirley Temple film called "The Bluebird". During the showing of the film the air raid sirens sounded. There was a procedure for evacuating the theatre during emergencies and as we left our seats the first set of bombs hit the building. Immediately the lights went out. Part of the upper floors and the balcony had collapsed, trapping people in the back rows, and the whole place was full of flying dust and bits of brick. Mother clutched me tight, making sure I was safe. We tried to make for the exit and there were some theatre ushers with torches trying to get the patrons out in an orderly manner. Then the second stick of bombs struck. People in the exit



*WWII bomb damage.*

tunnels were blown back by the blast and the concussion was ear bursting. More brickwork had fallen and now a fire that had started blocked us in. What a mess, but mother never panicked and she never relaxed her hold on me; her grasp was so firm that I bore the marks of her fingers for many weeks.

Mother steered me down a corridor at the side of the building and as well as coping with the fire and the intense smoke, there were broken electric cables hanging down and were sparking as they came in contact with metal. We were jostled and even climbed over by men pushing their way to safety. Not all of the men were patriotic or helpful and we were unfortunately to experience many more examples of people who cared little for their fellow man.

By October 1940 the RAF had won the Battle of Britain and we were now subject to sporadic raids day and night designed to break the morale of the civilian population. These were dangerous as no particular target seemed indicated and sometimes we watched from the safety of a doorway a lone low-flying bomber just dropping its load over rows of houses.

The Germans had another way of terrorising the public. They saturated areas with anti personnel mines. These were released in batches from bombers and were designed like a sycamore seed with rotor like wings, which allowed the mine to rotate down to earth.

They were named butterfly bombs because of their gay colours and the wings. Every schoolteacher had a large poster depicting the bomb and each child was warned every day of the dangers of touching these things. Even so, there were people killed and injured by picking the things up. Despite the warnings some children brought them to school having found the thing in the hedgerow or in the gutter. The immediate reaction was to clear the school and call the army to come in and collect the bomb. It really made school very exciting but there were many days when schools were closed and education suffered accordingly. When I moved up to high school, to Ancona Senior School for Boys, there were a number of my friends from junior school there. I didn't really make friends, as it was too traumatic. Often there were gaps in the class. Vacant desks, clothes left in lockers, bits and pieces that the owner had left behind on desks, of wondering where they were. Each day we would begin class with a prayer to God, for some reason we believed He was on our side; we prayed for the King and Queen and all our people overseas fighting. Each day the teacher would advise the class that 'so and so' would not be attending as they had died in last night's bombing. Several close friends went this way and each time I vowed not to get too friendly with boys or girls again. Michael Potter, Billy Benefield. George Gray, and on and on....

Dougie Brown had no mother, she was killed in an air raid: David Kite's father was killed in the RAF: a bomb killed Dorothy MacDonald's mother: we had lots of solo parents long before it became fashionable. Don't get fond of anyone because it hurts when you lose him or her!

Nearly all the teachers were retired people who, because all the young men and women had been called up for military service, had been recalled back to teaching.

Only a few teachers stand out in my memory. Mr Rosewarne, my teacher through several classes and schools. We had to move schools constantly. As one school was damaged we were fitted into another, wherever space was available. Inevitably we were returned to our original school again, when the damage had been cleared and was repaired. Often we sat in temporary classrooms, some without glass in windows. School began at 9 am and finished at 4.30 pm except in the winter, when we finished at 4.00 pm. Lunch was 12 to 1 PM and we were provided with a cooked meal, with some sort of meat, usually spam and vegetables. A pudding, either custard tart or an economy plum duff, followed this. I particularly appreciated the duff and custard and I retain a liking for it to this day. At playtime each afternoon we lined up by classes with our spoons and were given a heaped spoonful of malt extract and vitamin C. Mr Rosewarne was absent for some days and we had Mr Stanley as our teacher. Mr Stanley explained that Mr Rosewarne's only son, an RAF pilot, had been killed in action and we were asked to be particularly kind to him if he returned. He did, and remained a strict and unbending teacher for the rest of the time I spent with him. Among other things he took us for singing. He had a fine voice and played on rather, by now, battered old piano and taught us songs. His favourite as I recall was "Dan Cupid has a garden where women are the flowers and lovers' laughs and lovers' tears are the sunshine and the showers". There were others but this is the one that had the most meaning for me.

The bombing continued and life carried on. I attended church regularly and was a member of the choir. I was also a member of the church Scout group and attended camp on a couple of occasions. I was confirmed in this church, and spent a great deal of time in the vicarage particularly when the school was not open, doing lessons with the other choristers taught by the vicar. The parish history records the following.

'The numbers attending services were very good although they could have been forgiven for staying in bed to catch up on their sleep. We quite often existed night after night with just two or three hours 'sleep'.

Apart from going to work, every able bodied person had to do something to help the war effort; it could be fire watching, air raid warden, heavy and light rescue, first aid stations or helping in the hospitals. Southwark Cathedral called for at least four people from our church to fire watch every Monday evening throughout the year. We are pleased to report that we always managed to fulfil our commitments. We



*Ascension Church, Timbercroft Lane, adjacent to the school.*

watched daily the aeroplanes of the RAF and the German Air Force fighting in the sky above our small group of houses. We saw British and German aircraft fall out of the sky in flames. Being outdoors was hazardous because of falling debris. Expended ammunition cases would fall from the aircraft and could and frequently did inflict injuries upon those foolish enough to wander about during a raid.

The other ever-present danger was being shot up by German aircraft as they headed back to France. On two occasions a low flying Messerschmitt strafed the bus we were travelling in. Everybody dived out and into the ditch on the side of the road, the bigger children sheltering the younger ones, all of us shaken and crying. After the second occasion it was evacuation time again. Just before I left we had a German fighter crash land in our field. The Home Guard was on the scene very quickly to rescue the German pilot from the wrath of the locals. They also mounted guard over the plane to prevent it being pilfered.

Next day we were permitted to sit in the cockpit for a few minutes for a donation to the Spitfire fund of sixpence. I have often wondered if the guns of the plane had been unloaded, as the kids were pushing and pulling levers and buttons with great gusto and a burst from the wing mounted machine guns would have been a great surprise.

In her pamphlet 'The Ascension, Plumstead from Roman Times,' Edith Calver writes:

"When war broke out in 1939 preparations were made to evacuate the children, so when raids started these plans were put into practice. All schools were closed. Timbercroft School became a First Aid Post in one school, Auxiliary Fire Station in another, the third was equipped with mattresses to accommodate those folk who were bombed out"

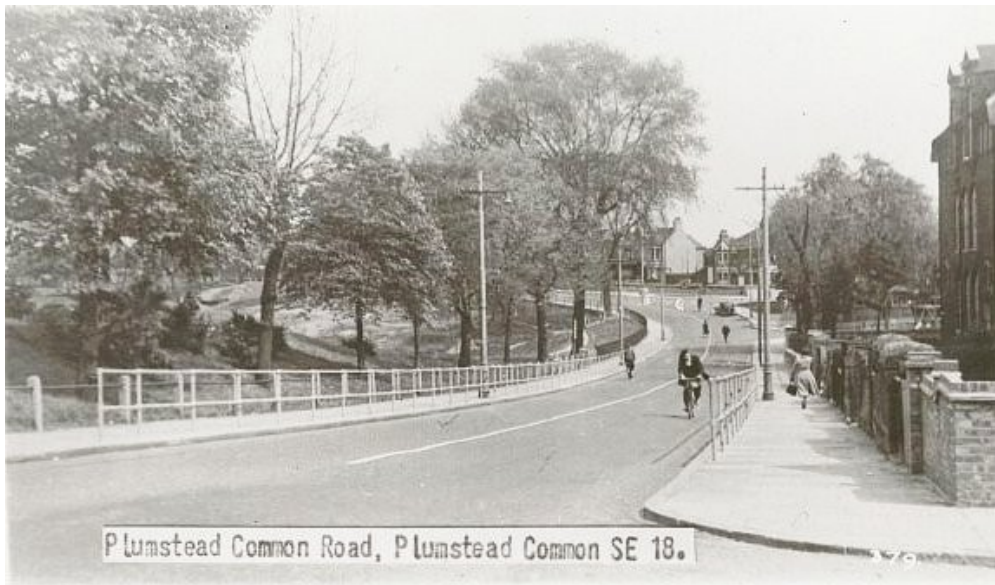
It was about this time that I ran foul of the school authorities. The roof of Timbercroft School was criss-crossed with catwalks for fire watching and fire control. It was too exciting to resist and a group of us climbed onto the roof just to explore. We were apprehended and each received six of the best on the seat of our pants.

As the school was closed and a number of children were not evacuated, Father Cox of the Ascension Church, adjacent to the school, took these into the vicarage where he and his wife Nora ran a temporary school for the under 11's.

It is difficult to explain the emotional strain that these events imposed on both children and parents and indeed our teachers. All suffered some loss that affected their relationship with us children.

During the lulls in the bombing we attended school and teachers endeavoured to make our daily attendance as normal as possible. We would have our daily bottle of milk and in the afternoon we would be given a large dose of malt and cod liver oil. Some of us would have a cooked lunch supplied by the kitchen at the Slade School.

We suffered daily visits from the Germans and at night also which made for very tired children at school the next day.



*Slade School is the building on the right. The Ravine is on the left, pictured in late 1940's.*

Some of us were in the choir at the Ascension Church and during one week in the spring of 1941 we had 90 funerals. This sounds impossible but you must realise that because whole families were killed together, they were buried together. The Billinghursts were one family of four children, parents and grand parents who were killed. The Taylor family were holding a 21st birthday party with about 24 guests: all died in a bombing raid.

Friends missing from school, empty desks, it was sad not knowing if a friend had died or had been evacuated.

As one school closed due to damage we were often moved with our teacher to another school. I attended Plum Lane School for several weeks and also the Slade.

Eventually the bombing was so bad that I was evacuated to Builth Wells in Wales. I attended the village school until late 1944 and returned to Plumstead and Timbercroft.

I completed my education at Ancona Road Secondary School.



*School children salvaging waste paper.*



*Salvaging pots and pans, all for the war effort.*

However, there were lulls in the bombing and life went on. Pupils of Timbercroft did their

bit for the war effort in a number of ways. Mr and Mrs Stanley organised the paper salvage effort. We were tasked with collecting from our community, waste paper and old pots and pans. (See previous photos of WWII paper and pots and pan salvaging) The incentive to do well was a red label issued by our teachers, which bore a military rank. We boys strived to advance our rank by pestering neighbours for paper and pans. Most of the class became brigadiers but the girls were not so much involved in this activity. We were told that our tin cans and pots would go to making a Spitfire or a Hurricane, which impressed us boys greatly.

Our other contribution was the school allotment. Go out of the main gate, turn left and walk down Thornhill Avenue to Swingate Lane. Directly opposite was the sports ground. A section of this had been dug up and the pupils planted a variety of vegetables. What became of the fruits of our labour I cannot remember.

As the war progressed the school, apart from the sandbags at all the windows, and the catwalks on the roof, returned to almost a normal routine. There were still raids and by now we were being bothered by V1's, the doodlebugs. These soon became V2's and were frightening because there was no warning of their coming.

As late as 1945 a V2 devastated a dozen or more homes and families in Landstead Road.

*If Nurses could only tell*

When a husband's kiss becomes a peck on the cheek often it's the wife's dingy and un-attractive teeth that are to blame.

Teeth are part of your personality. To be really attractive they must be kept "Colgate-clean". Scientific tests prove that Colgate's ensures a fragrant mouth in 7 cases out of 10.

Play Safe! use  
**COLGATE**  
RIBBON DENTAL CREAM  
*Twice a day*

1/1 Including Tax

# Hopping On A Horse Tram

*Article from the Kentish Independent Newspaper*

*E.R. Oakley*

My boyhood days were spent around the Wickham Lane district of Plumstead and I remember quite well some of the stone horse troughs mentioned by Mr. E.W. Buis in his article "All change" in the "K.I." of 17 April.

There is one still standing today (which, incidentally Mr Buis omitted to mention) at the top of Bostall Hill by the junction with Longleigh Lane.

Of particular interest to me, however, is his mention of horse and electric trams.

While he is correct in saying that the horse trams "bridged the gap" from the L.L.C. electric trams at Albion Hill to the Bexley cars at "The Plume of Feathers," Plumstead High Street, this in no means the whole story.

Originally, in 1881, a 3' 6" gauge horse tramway was constructed by the Woolwich and South East London Tramways Co. and ran from "The Plume of Feathers" to "The King William IV," Trafalgar Road, East Greenwich.

The depot was at the bottom of Cage Lane, later Lakedale Road, and is still in use as a motor garage, aptly named 'Tram Yard.'

It wasn't until 1903 that Bexley Council cars began running into Plumstead, and then they terminated end-on with the horse cars, outside "The Plume."

Also in 1903 the L.C.C. opened the first section of the newly electrified reconstructed line from East Greenwich to Westminster, built to "standard" or 4' 8 1/2" gauge.



*Tram Terminus. Plumstead High Street c1910.  
Photo: Kind permission Greenwich Heritage Centre.*



*Close-up of horse drawn tram, Beresford Square, c1900. Detail  
from a photo:  
Kind permission of Greenwich Heritage Centre.*

Over the next few years extensions eastwards were made to this conduit electric tramway.

In 1905 the L.C.C. purchased the Woolwich horse tramway and in 1907 closed the portion between "The Plume" and Beresford Square, Woolwich, for reconstruction on the overhead system of current collection and at standard gauge.

An extension to Abbey Wood was also built and the new line opened in 1908. Bexley cars commenced to run through to Woolwich as a consideration for the purchase of their tracks in Plumstead High Street by the L.C.C.



*Horse drawn trams passing Arsenal Gates, Beresford Square, late Victorian era.*

Shortly afterwards, this line was extended to Nile Street (Free Ferry), and this remained the terminus for a number of years.

In 1910 a new depot was opened to house the electric cars of the L.C.C. at the end of the line at Abbey Wood. Originally intended to provide accommodation for 25 cars, it was not long before it was enlarged and its ultimate capacity was 86 cars.

In 1911 the L.C.C. extended this conduit electric line eastwards to Chapel Street, Woolwich, and from this time until November 1913 the "gap" was 'bridged' by the horse tramway, just over a 1/2 mile long, and operated by one or two cars.

These cars were housed in the now disused car shed at Lakedale Road, and conveyed to the narrow gauge line each day by a long standard gauge truck with a length of narrow gauge track on its deck.

Early in 1914, with the 'gap closed', electric cars ran through from London to Abbey Wood.

As to Mr Buis' remarks about Bexley trams being cast-offs from most of the corporations in the country, I'm afraid that here he is very much "off the track," so to speak.

Bexley purchased 12 four-wheeled cars of the open top type with which to commence services. These were new vehicles and were housed at the depot built near the eastern end of the line, not far from the Graveyard Hill terminus.

Two services were operated, one from Plumstead (later Woolwich) to Gravel Hill, and the

other over the same line as far as Bexleyheath Market Place and then along Mayplace Road to the council boundary at Northumberland Heath.

Before long, however, the 'Main line' became Woolwich Northumberland Heath and remained so for many years before circumstances caused Bexley to allow the Bexley Heath Service to be operated by Erith Council.

About two years after the commencement of these services, four more cars were purchased to maintain an anticipated increase in traffic.

During the early part of the 1914-18 war Bexley borrowed six class "B" L.C.C. four wheeled covered top cars to enable them to cope with the vast increase in munitions worker traffic, and in 1917 due to Dartford Tramways depot and cars being totally destroyed by fire on the night of August Bank Holiday hired more L.C.C. cars to enable them to maintain the joint service to Horns Cross.

Eventually 17 of these cars were purchased and remained in service, along with the open top cars, until the whole lot was taken over by the L.P.T.B on 1 July 1933.

As all the cars were by then 30 years old and nearing the end of their lives, they were replaced by class "M" cars of the late L.C.C. Although these cars were 22 years old they were much more sturdily constructed and had many more years of life left in them. These were all covered top cars, and maintained the service until replaced by trolley buses during the night of the 23/24 November 1935.

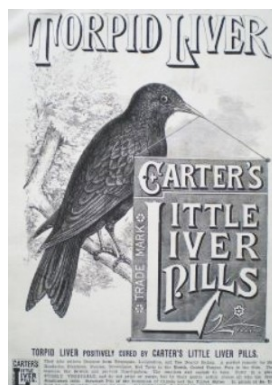
It is true to say that the track of Bexley tramway was bad. This, coupled with the fact that most of it was single line with passing places, making the service very slow, was the main reason which prompted the L.P.T.B to change over to trolley buses when they did.

In closing, I would like to say that there is an excellent book, 'The Tramways of Woolwich and South East London,' published by the Tramway and Light Rail Society and the Light Railway Transport League, which gives the complete story of tramways in the Woolwich area, and I am sure that Mr. Buis, and many other people, would enjoy reading about this fascinating period in our local History.

The Kentish Independent newspaper is now history along with the tram, which was before my time. I can remember the trolleybuses. Also the rails in Beresford square.

***Article submitted by Derek Crompton.***

*Editors footnote: Photos added to original story.*



# *Horse Drawn Home Deliveries.*

*Albert Richard Hooper*

One day during the mid 50's Colin showed up at our front door all excited at the news of a terrible accident that had happened a little earlier in the day on Walmer Terrace, somewhere around the bottom of Elmley Street, near Plumstead Railway Station.

Being typical young boys looking for excitement, always on the lookout for newsworthy stories to tell at school, we went off to inspect the accident scene straight away.

As Colin attended Conway Road School, and me Timbercroft Lane School, I think we saw ourselves as the 'Official Reporters' for our own schools.

When we arrived at the scene, or as close to it as we were allowed, it was very apparent that a runaway RACS horse and cart, either bread or milk, I can't recollect, had taken off down Elmley Street, and sailed straight through the fence.

The fence, luckily, held the weight of the cart, but the poor injured horse was just hanging there, inflicting more injuries to itself as it thrashed about in sheer panic.

I believe that it was humanely put down at the scene and then removed.

The above accident was probably my saddest memory from those days of horse drawn home deliveries: thankfully though, my other memories are a lot happier.

The Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS) delivered all their bread and milk by horse drawn vehicles in those days, which was such an adventuresome sight to my young eyes and imaginative mind.

The milkman with his horse and cart usually came first, and he was pretty quiet about the whole thing as I remember.

Sometimes the only sound you heard was the clinking of his hand tray of bottles as he climbed almost every set of steps on Sladedale Road, and then descended the steps of the 'areas', situated in front of the few homes requiring a delivery to their lower front door.

Every now and then he'd drop a bottle, which would just about wake the whole street and make a few dogs bark, and no doubt cause a wee chuckle in some homes.

One day, the modern United Dairies battery operated electric float arrived on our street. The driver, named Dennis, parked it just down the road a bit from the RACS horse wagon.

Dennis, at the rear of his new flash looking milk float, went to grab a bottle of 'gold top'. Suddenly, it spun out of his hand, went up in the air, and crashed onto the road, exploding into dozens of pieces of glass.

At this, the two men on the RACS cart, high up in their seat, stood up and loudly applauded the circus juggler from the United Dairy.

The laughter from some of the houses within hearing distance was also quite evident and, as everyone took it all in good humour, this humorous incident only brightened the start to many people's day.

The RACS bread delivery was a whole different story. Their arrival was very loud, because of all the shouting and bellowing of, "Bre ..... Ed!" It could be heard way off in the distance, long before they even turned onto our street.

"Bre ..... Ed, Fresh Bre ..... Ed!" would be repeated every few yards to draw your attention to the bread delivery.

I always wondered why the word fresh was always added to the shouting, because who would want to buy stale old bread anyway!

As time went by I got to know the owner of the voice that kept shouting "Bre .....Ed!"

He was a much older lad by the name of John, and he lived on Alabama Street.

He often spoke to my older brother Tony or to Colin's older brother Mark, so it was obvious that they had all known each other from school.

The slow clip clop of the RACS home delivery horse was wonderful to hear as they went past our house every day.

Later in the day I'd see them trotting along Plumstead Common Road, to either re-stock or to head home.

The sight of them going along the road at speed was an imagination trigger, and I'd see images of Wells Fargo Stagecoaches from North America, or the Cobb & Co coaches from Australia, if you remember the "Whiplash" TV Series with Peter Graves.

In the movie "Paint Your Wagon" there is a wonderful scene where Lee Marvin is driving a Stagecoach, dressed in an old Spanish cavalry uniform, and the song "There's a Coach Coming In" is being sung with great gusto, as he heads back to 'No Name City' with his much needed wagon load of women on board.

Ever time I see that part of the movie, I'm reminded of the RACS bread delivery horse and cart as it was driven past The Slade and up the hill towards the Links, or coming the other way, through Birds Nest Hollow.

Many years later, after I'd been working for some years in the Engineering Department of The British Columbia Telephone Company in Vancouver, I suddenly heard an all too familiar voice coming from just outside my office.

I sat there for a moment, trying to identify exactly where I'd heard that specific voice before, and as I kept going way back to my childhood days, the puzzle was driving me absolutely crazy.

Rising from my chair I slowly walked to the door, only to be introduced to a visiting manager from another department by the name of John Blackman.

On seeing him I suddenly realized that he was the SAME young lad that had been the owner of the "Bre .....Ed!" voice all those years earlier from the RACS deliveries.

We stood there checking each other out for quite some time, while the others carried on with their meeting. Once I'd established that he was originally from Plumstead, I asked him if he'd ever delivered bread.

Yes indeed! He was the same John that announced his arrival every day all around The Slade area by bellowing out what he had to sell. Well, we had a fine old time chatting about the RACS home deliveries and those old times.

“Looks like you’ve done well,” I said, pointing to his nice hand stitched suit, leather briefcase and polished shoes.

“You aren’t doing too badly either!” he kindly acknowledged, and then he'd remembered that my brother had told him how I'd gone on to the Woolwich Polytechnic Secondary Technical School for boys after I'd left Plum Lane.

“The Poly taught me to use me loaf!” I said, with a smile on my face.

“Was that a small brown sliced loaf, or big white crusty one?” he quickly replied with typical Common kids humour in his voice.

The other folk attending the meeting, and others within hearing distance almost went into cardiac arrest as, smiling, looking at each other, in unison, we started bellowing, “Bre..... Ed!”



# *In the beginning... Plumstead*

*Roger Jaques*

I was born in Plumstead in 1947. My birth was at home at 97 Hudson Road (Hudson Road is now no more). I went to St Margaret's Primary School, which was opposite St Margaret's Church (also now gone). For my secondary school I went to Eltham Green Comprehensive.

I can't say that my Plumstead was either a sleepy haven or a down-and-out backwater. It was just Plumstead, the town I was born in and where I grew up till I was around eighteen.

In my formative years the part of Plumstead I lived in seemed to me to be a green and flowery suburb. The streets lined with terraced houses, most built from reddish brown brick. It was always sunny (a view which I guess most children have no matter where they live) and not as grey as the Woolwich end of town.

Our house was a decent three-storey domicile built in the late 1800's with a smallish garden that was just big enough for me to drive my red coupe pedal car around – circumnavigating the area where the air raid shelter used to sit. We needed the four bedrooms that the house provided as my brother, Norman (twelve years older than I) and my twin sisters, June and Jackie (six years older) and also my mother's parents lived with us.

I was quite young when my grandparents left this world. My grandfather died first and my memories of him are few. He did keep rabbits in a wooden cage outside the back door. The strongest memory, however, was the 'Muffin the Mule' puppet he made for me. Hand



*Grandparents - Mr & Mrs Yeatman.*



*St Margaret's Church, 1951. Now long demolished. Photo; Alan Read.*

carved, hand painted with strings, the TV show being a favourite of mine. After his passing my gran would have lived on for three or four years and was, among other things, interested in Greek mythology and butterflies and moths.

Dad (Bill) worked with his brother Reg as an auto electrician, the business being owned by Reg, with the garage located at the bottom of Burrage Road, one shop up from Plumstead Road. I think dad learned his trade in the Ambulance Corp. during the war. The Garage was an exciting place for me to visit and to this day I can still smell the "Swarfega", a cleanser they used for getting the grease off their hands.

I attended an Anglican church primary school that was then aged around a hundred years old (as was the accompanying church, St Margaret's). It was only a short walk to school.



*Me with my nan. c1948.*



*Norman, six, with twins, June & Jackie, less than a year old.*



*Myself with the 'mumps' 1952.*

Some days were more special than others. Funny how the mind works when you're young. I remember quite clearly (in my head anyway) that I had written a song while walking to school one rainy morning. The song turned out to be Heartbreak Hotel. I don't think Elvis ever found out that I had written one of his biggest hits! I was nine or ten at the time.

Every so often my mum gave me a penny to spend at the little shop opposite the church, at the top of Vicarage Road. Black Jacks and Fruit Salads (four for a penny), Spaceships, Sherbet Dabs and Fruit Tingles and so on. Across the road from the school was Plumstead Common, with its undulating grassy hills and trees; also the bandstand, which stood on a small hillock and had gravel pathways for kids on trikes or mothers with the enormous prams of the day.

The Common was also where St Margaret's Junior School once held a sports carnival. I came third in a running race. The church, to my young eyes, was a place of grandeur. Beautifully coloured stained glass windows held a fascination for me, with all the different characters. Some I recognised but others were just people wearing odd apparel. It was almost compulsory to attend church on Sundays. My parents were married at St Margaret's. My brother was a choir and altar boy and for many years a close friend of the vicar, Canon Morecombe. My sisters also attended church but probably more for social than religious reasons. Come Sunday morning I was dressed to the nines with slicked down hair and polished shoes. I would walk up Hudson Road to the church, meet the locals waiting at the gates prior to the service, then, as we entered the church, be greeted with a nod and a smile by the vicar.

I was confirmed at St Margaret's when I was thirteen, but for different reasons became disenchanted with religion. However, my religious upbringing served me well, putting

me top of the Religious Studies class at secondary school.

The area around our home was dotted with bombsites where once houses stood. These bombsites were formed by the misplaced bombs of World War II, meant for the Woolwich Arsenal, resulting in the loss of many homes and hundreds of lives. But I was a kid and I was amazed at what could be found on these sites; and this was fifteen years after the war. They had become places on which to offload any junk items the locals had. When I was a teenager I found a bicycle frame on a nearby bombsite. After a clean up and paint it became a much used bike for many years.

Birds Nest Hollow, on Plumstead Common Road, bordered the Common to the south. This hub of shops boasted a post office, a supermarket, a baker, a cobbler, a wet fish shop and even a greasy spoon cafe. At the top of the hill, just before you got to The Links was a toyshop and a wool shop. I remember the wool shop mainly because this store also sold ladies' stockings, items I was forced to purchase for my sisters when at a young and embarrassment-filled age.

I also saw my first movie (*Carry on Sergeant*) at the Globe Cinema that used to be a few doors up from the Post Office. I believe it was for my eleventh birthday. There also used to be a cinema on Plumstead Road, the name of which I can't remember, but I do remember going on my own to see *Bambi*. I must have been about twelve. I found myself sitting behind my cousin, who I saw was smoking! He was a year older than me and when I tapped him on the shoulder, did he turn pale, as he thought I might tell his dad. I didn't, of course.

The other side of the Hollow saw Plumstead rising towards Shooters Hill. The main road up was Plum Lane, a hill that seemed like a mountainside. Guess which road was part of my paper run! Especially on wet and windy Sundays, toting papers that weighed more than I did! Great view from the top, though. At Plum Lane's peak, to the left, was Shrewsbury Park, which seemed like a forest to me. Oxleas Wood on the other side of Shooters Hill was even bigger. Another early morning newspaper excursion was Barnfield Gardens, high-rise flats. I'm not sure when the flats were built, but by the time I became acquainted with them they showed definite signs of ageing, with several abandoned cars languishing around the perimeter.

To the east of the Hollow were Winn's Common and the Links, home to the Royal Arsenal Cooperative Society emporium for the more sophisticated consumer. Ladies and Gentlemen's bespoke tailoring, haberdashery and a classy bakery for your wedding cakes etc. I purchased my first suit



*Norman, 17, June & Jackie, 11 and myself, 5. c.1952.*



*Myself! c.1960.*

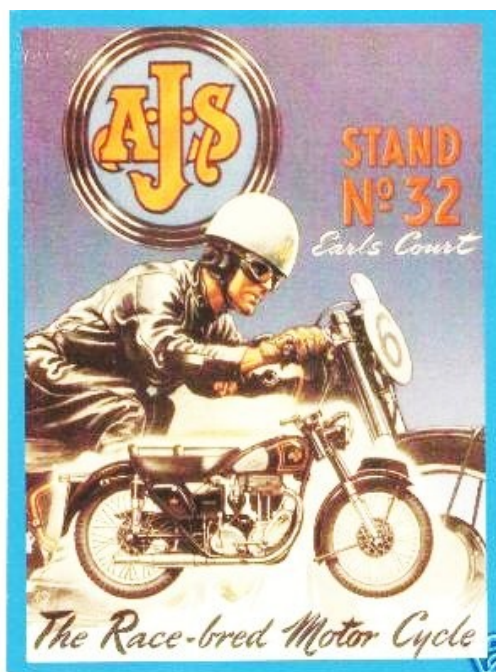
in the Gentlemen's dept. The Links was a departmental store, a forerunner to today's mega stores. When purchasing, your money and bill were loaded into a cylinder, which, in turn, was loaded into a tube and whisked away by compressed air to an invisible place only to return minutes later with your receipt and change. A much more relaxed time back then.

In the fifties mum took me to the paddling pool on Winn's Common. I was only allowed to stay down one end because the bigger kids up the other end didn't tend to notice us small ones and were likely to use you as a stepping-stone in their games of chase. Later, so I was told, it was linked with the spread of polio, which was rife in the late fifties and early sixties, and became out of bounds.

A special place for me was the Matchless/AJS motorcycle factory. It lay between Maxey Road and Burrage Road, on the northern side of the main rail line. I could stand at the wire link fence and stare across the rail line to the gleaming motorbikes waiting to be loaded on to the trains and lorries for delivery. It was a hive of industry, with bikes being wheeled out of the factory and pushed up and down various ramps. Men dressed in grey overalls would straddle a bike, give the crank a kick and ride the bike away down the other end to some distant shed. Intermittently, big black steam trains huffed and puffed between the bikes and myself. The smell of smoke would permeate my nostrils and chest, leaving a decidedly coal-like taste in the mouth.

During the summer school holidays I was 'urged' to go to summer school, at Foxhill Primary School, down Nightingale Place, a delightfully steep hill, which often had the older cars stumped. I remember sitting on the school steps and watching an old Morris, which had stalled whilst trying to climb up. The driver of a bus was pushing it from behind; the cars and lorries were forced to stop behind it as the street was single lane only. The kafuffle lasted quite a while as the heavily laden lorries found it difficult to restart on the steep gradient after the Morris went on his merry way.

Plumstead has faded in my mind and I am sorry that it is so, but that's old age for you. Every now and again I come across photos on the web that stir up the sludge that is my brain and I revisit dear old Plumstead, my Homestead.



AJS advertising poster for Earls Court show.



Earlier styled heading from 1945.

# *Invitation To Buckingham Palace*

*The Earnest Kelly Story by Mary Bates nee Coulson*

*Grand daughter of Ernest Kelly.*

In the 1914-18 war, my grandfather was injured in France and was taken to Brook Hospital. His name was Ernest Kelly.



*Ernest Kelly (with the X over his head).*

Among my grandparent's letters, etc. is a letter from a Mrs Agnes Clarke. Address: Holly House, Plumstead Common, Woolwich, and dated 28th January 1916. Her telephone number was Woolwich 229.

Mrs Clarke wrote and said my grandfather was doing well, and that she saw him

regularly as her brother was in the Hospital. I would imagine my grandmother would have been very pleased to receive news of her husband. Woolwich would have been quite a journey in those days. My grandmother treasured this letter.

My grandfather had a very bad leg injury and had a plate inserted into it. I never saw the scar. It was bad enough for him to be discharged from the Army.

My grandfather was 28 years of age when the hospital photos were taken. In regards to the Invitation to the Palace Mews, I wrote off in 2002 to see if there was any records kept of the incident. My email had been forwarded onto the



*The photo of Mrs Kelly (Ernest's wife) was originally painted onto silk.*

Assistant Curator Royal Photograph Collection. There are four images of the occasion. These are mounted in one of Queen Mary's photograph album... So anyone out there whose great/grandfather attended the occasion they may find there is a photograph to buy. (Nice to have a letter from Windsor Castle).



This and the previous photo are of Ernest (cross above head) whilst at the Brook Hospital. Below is Ernest's WWI award certificate.



Below is a letter written by Agnes Clarke to Mrs Kelly, the wife of Ernest Kelly in 1916.

TELEPHONE  
WOOLWICH 229.

HOLLY HOUSE,  
PLUNSTEAD COMMON,  
WOOLWICH.

25<sup>th</sup> Jan'y 1916

Dear Mrs Kelly

You will no  
doubt wonder who I am.  
but I have been going up  
to the Brook Hospital very  
often lately (I had a  
brother-in-law there) & I  
have seen your husband  
very often. He tells me  
you are coming down to

see him, now I think if  
I were you, I would wait  
till he gets up north  
which I would think  
he would in about three  
weeks from now. If he  
gets on as he is doing  
he seems quite well except  
for his leg which is going  
on as well as possible.  
It is a long expensive  
journey even to London &  
you have to get across  
London there an hour's

journey down here, then  
you can only see him  
for a couple of hours.  
I know how hard it  
must be, but if you  
could wait till he  
comes north, I think it  
would be better. Your  
husband told me about  
your little boy's foot.  
I hope it is better.  
I will write again if  
you like & tell you

how he goes on.  
Yours truly Sincerely  
(M<sup>no</sup>) Agnes Clarke

Below is Ernest's invitation to Buckingham Palace to meet the King and Queen.



*Ernest with his dog, years after the war had ended.*



*Brook War Hospital during the WWI era.*

# *Iris Gildon (nee Hanaford)*

*Iris Gildon*

I was born in 1921 and my brother 1923 in Brookhill Road, Woolwich.

I am left-handed and when I started school in 1926 it was considered wrong and they tried all sorts of ways to get me to write right-handed, like having my left hand behind my back. When I began to stutter they decided to leave me alone and that was the end of that.

When I was six my maternal grandmother died and we moved to live with my granddad in Marmadon Road where the railway ran at the bottom of the garden. There were two



*Plumstead Central School c.1930. Iris Hannaford (now Gildon) is seated, second row on left, two down from back row.*



*Plumstead Central School c.1930. Cissi is the girl Iris wrote to in the story; 'Blitz Over Plumstead and Districts' is back row, far left. Iris is next row down, standing forth from left. Cissi's sister, far left, next row down.*

*Photos: Iris Gildon.*

bedrooms, one for my mum and dad and the other for my granddad and us children. We had a small front room, which we came into from the front door. A kitchen with a coal fired range for cooking led into a scullery with a built in copper with a fire underneath for heating water and doing washing. There was an outside lavatory with

newspaper cut into squares and hung on a piece of string. There was also a tin bath out here and this came in once a week for a bath in front of the fire. I remember one of the walls in the kitchen was made of wood with a floor at the bottom and behind this was a staircase leading to the two bedrooms upstairs.

Then I went to Conway Road School and my mum took me up to the



*Beasley Brewery delivery dray, Lakedale Road.*

High Street and across the road, and then I walked up Galloson Road to the school. When my brother was old enough, he too went to the same school. There are memories of "cat's whiskers" for tuning into the crystal set to listen to the wireless with headphones. My granddad would give us one earphone each so that my brother and I could listen at the same time.

There are memories of Lakedale Road with the Fire Station on the corner with the

High Street. There was Bradshaw's the greengrocers who also ran charabancs, Morgan's the grocers and the Co-op on the corner of Conway Road and Lakedale Road with all the departments and the check office with the tin checks collected and counted for dividend. Then there was Beasley's Brewery and the smell of beer brewing and the big dray horses pulling the drays loaded with wooden barrels of beer. The pavements were black with mulberry juice where the trees hung over the Brewery wall round the corner into Conway Road.

When we were at Conway Road School on Empire Day, which was 24th May, each class marched into the playground and lined up with little Union Jacks to wave and sang "Land of Hope and Glory" and "Jerusalem" before marching back to lessons again.

When I was eleven we moved to a house in Conway Road on the corner of Ingledew Road. On the opposite corner was Dr Henry's surgery. The house still had gas lamps with mantles and it was some years before electricity was connected. My brother and I shared a room for some years and mum and dad and granddad had a bedroom each. We now had a "front room", a dining room, kitchen and another room downstairs with a glass door leading out to the garden at the back. We still had to wash in the kitchen and still had an outside lavatory, but we now had a gas copper for hot water and still bathed in the tin bath in front of the fire in the dining room. Eventually the downstairs room became a bedroom for my granddad and my brother and I had a bedroom each at last. There were shops in Conway Road from Liffler Road to Griffin Road on the left hand side of the road. On the other side of the road there was Basil's hardware shop and Post Office on the corner of Ancona Road and on the corner of Griffin Road was a Catholic church.

At the bottom corner of Griffin Road and the High Street was Chapman's the bakers with the lovely smell of bread baking. When you bought the hot cottage loaves it was very tempting to eat some of it before you got it home.

After we had taken the "11 plus", which school you went to depended on how well you had done in the exam. Some of us went to the King's Warren School (known as the Brown School

because of its uniform), some to the Central School and others to a Secondary School. There was a Catholic School up on Bostall Heath, which was St Joseph's Convent. I went to the Central School, which had an entrance on the High Street and another one in Ancona Road. This was fortunate for me living in Conway Road.



*Chapman Bakers, on the corner of Griffin Road and Plumstead High Street, Tel: WOO 0388. Orchard Street is the next street on the right, just past the 'New Cross Empire' poster and in front of the Rose and Crown public house, which is the last of the darker buildings, with a large lamp in front. Photo: Helen Jones.*

We played Netball and Stool Ball in the school playground and we were marched along to the Plumstead Baths for swimming lessons. On Sports Day we went to Cooks Farm, which was on the junction of Bostall Hill and the road down to Abbey Wood. There we used their fields for various races and so on. This was a great day away from the playground and like being out in the country. We envied the Grammar School girls who played tennis.

We used to go up on to Plumstead Common and play cricket with my brother and his friends, paddle in the lake and sail boats and so on. Sometimes we used to go down to Plumstead Station cross the road and climb up on to the grassy sewer bank and walk along the top to Abbey Wood, Belvedere, Erith and on and on to the Cross Ness Power Station.

Hilda, Cissie and I would occasionally cycle to All Hallows-on-Sea for a day out together, using the road which became the Rochester Bypass and later the A2. We all went to Sunday School at the Central Hall along the High Street from the Fire Station. This was a Methodist

church. Another friend called Joyce joined us here and we went to many concerts here and acted in many plays about missionaries, and my black doll was frequently used in them (I still have it). Sunday School treats were always to Sheerness. My brother and I used to go to the Kinema in the High Street on Saturday morning to see a film, and a family visit to the Empire, the variety theatre in Woolwich, was a real treat at times.

Another treat was going on the tram to Woolwich and catching the ferry; standing and watching all the engines working in the engine room. Then catching the train at North Woolwich to go to Tottenham to see my mother's aunt and all her cousins. They came to see us sometimes and I can still remember going up to Bostall Woods and walking with them in the snow one winter.

I remember on New Year's Eve all the noise made at midnight when all the boats on the Thames and in the docks, plus all the trains, hooted and sounded their sirens.

On Saturday we always went to see my paternal grandparents in Crescent Road, Woolwich. We would walk to the High Street and catch the tram to Beresford Square where there were all the market stalls and pie and eel shops with jellied eels and so on.

My dad bought watch parts to mend watches, his hobby, and various tools from other stalls. I remember the imposing gates of the Woolwich Arsenal but we never knew what went on behind those walls, which seemed to stretch for miles along towards Plumstead. We knew they tested guns because of the noisy explosions at times. There, my Uncle, Aunt and cousin from Well Hall would join us. The men would go to the pub, which was next door, and come back when it was time for supper and going home. I can remember the occasion when another aunt, known as 'happy' and married to a farmer in Kent, turned up. She arrived wearing trousers and was told by my grandma, sitting there in her black bombazine dress, "If that is how you are going to come dressed, you will not be welcome". She never came again; how times have changed!

After the Sunday roast dinner we always went for a family walk dressed in our 'Sunday Best' to one of the following; up to Bostall Woods and Bostall Heath, up Wickham Lane along by the brickfields, to Plumstead Cemetery to visit grandma's grave. Sometimes up to Fanny on the Hill and over the fields, or up on to Plumstead Common to Swingate Lane and over the strawberry fields to Welling and Danson Park. The latter brings back memories of one year when the lake there was frozen over and people were people skating on it. How I wished I could skate!



*Bostall Woods from Plumstead Common c1900's.*

Christmas of course was a memorable time when all the shops in Lakedale Road were decorated and in Woolwich the big department stores Cuffs and Garrett's were a sight to behold with their decorations. Nativity plays at school and Christmas carols. Making paper chains with strips of coloured paper pasted into rings and strung together and hung up at home and school. Then of course there had been the stirring of the Christmas pudding; putting small silver sixpences into the mixture and wondering if you would be the lucky one to get the slice with it in on Christmas Day and, of course, being allowed to lick the wooden spoon. Letters to Father Christmas and hoping to get what you wanted on Christmas morning. The excitement of Christmas morning and opening our presents. There was always a tangerine and apple plus a few nuts. Then came the real presents, a story book with thin card doll clothes to be detached and fixed over the doll on the appropriate page of the story. For my brother a tin car or train and a book. Sometimes it was something to wear. Then came Christmas dinner of chicken, roast vegetables and usually sprouts. Then the Christmas pudding and perhaps a silver sixpence followed by mince pies and custard. In the afternoon the aunts, uncles and cousins would arrive. We children then played with our toys, and we all played games, ate dates and figs, cracked nuts to eat and so on during the afternoon. The adults maybe had a little doze. Then later came teatime with another sit-down meal of perhaps salmon and cucumber for instance, followed by fruit and jelly. Of course Christmas cake as well as other cakes; all homemade of course (there had been more spoon licking). I remember one cake that was always bought each year and called a Tunis Cake. It was a Madeira cake topped with a layer of thick chocolate on top and marzipan fruits topping it.

The Central School was a mixed school, but only for morning assembly, when Mr Langley would sit at the piano and thump out the "te Deum" whilst we marched in. We did some lessons with the boys' teachers when we had Mr Conn to teach us algebra and geometry. We shared the same French teacher too. The boys joined us for bookkeeping with Mrs Whelan. The boys had the option of doing metalwork and woodwork or commercial subjects. The girls had housewifery and cooking lessons. We all did art with Mr Langley, including leatherwork. The girls were taught shorthand during the school time but we had to come back again after afternoon school finished. Cissie always came home with me as I lived nearest to the school and she lived in Parkdale Road. We were always greeted with the lovely smell of baking when we got home. Then it was back to the school hall, where by this time all the typewriters had been set up with wooden covers over the typewriter keys, this was to teach us to touch type to music.

The other thing we shared was dancing. The Headmaster was a great believer in teaching us ballroom dancing, ready for when we went to work. So every other year we did this and in between we did Country Dancing. Mr McKeon organized dances from time to time and we were taught the correct protocol and so on.

A forward thinking man in more ways than one, as in our final year we all had to take turns of being his secretary to prepare us for our next step towards work. So in 1936 we were sent to Snow Hill in London to see if there were any secretarial vacancies, as we had already by this time sat for our RSA exams. I was offered a job with a shipping company in Fenchurch Street in the City and I could start almost immediately. Then it was back home to tell my parents the news. Hilda also got a job in London too.

In 1936 my friend Hilda's parents purchased one of the first television sets and Cissie and I used to go to their house in Howarth Road, Abbey Wood, to watch some of the programmes on a very small screen housed in a large wooden cabinet. Sometimes her aunt and uncle with their two sons, Jim and Frank, used to come over from Bexley for the evening too. Hilda and I used to go over to their house sometimes for the evening and play card games and so on. Here I met their grandma who lived with them, another old lady in a big black bombazine dress!

The day war was declared I was down at Hilda's house and we were waiting to hear whether there was to be a war or not. The announcement finally came that, "We are now at war" and the air raid sirens sounded immediately taking us all by surprise. We had to go down into the air raid shelter, which they had already built in their garden. Eventually, when the 'All Clear' was sounded, I went home as quickly as possible thinking what might happen going to work the next day. The air raid shelters were all right for a short while but not for a long air raid. As history tells us, not a lot happened for a long time. All the shops and homes were prepared and had "blackout" curtains; there were no streetlights at night. Various foods disappeared as time went by and Plumstead seemed very different, despite very little happening locally. I still travelled up to London daily to work in the City. I enjoyed working for Mr Scott as his secretary and there was another secretary to Mr Jackson who was a director too. There were two male clerks known as Fisher and Dollery. Fisher lived at Abbey Wood, which was the station before Plumstead, and we met on the train sometimes. The other secretary was Miss Drury; it was all very formal in those days. One thing that I still remember vividly was the advertisement board at Maze Hill Station en route saying "They come as a boon and a blessing to men, the Pickwick, the Owl and the Waverley Pen."

Then came 1939 when we were travelling with gas masks, anticipating that WAR would start in earnest soon. We had only had a few air raid sirens sounding, which did not last long. We got stuck in the railway tunnels sometimes in the pitch dark when this happened. It was always lovely to get back to Plumstead and home. My dad worked in the power station by the ferry and we all felt safe and sound when we were all at home together. *\*See Footnote.*

We still continued to go out and go to dances at the Woolwich Polytechnic, hoping nothing would happen. We walked there via Maxey Road, where there was the Matchless Motor Cycle Works still operating.

Then came 1940 and the Battle of Britain with air raids day and night. Travelling to work became a nightmare and eventually it was decided that we could no longer work from Fenchurch Street. We then had to go to Mr Jackson's house in Surrey to work, but only every other day, taking it in turns, so that we had a day off to get some sleep.

Jim used to come over to my parents' house and play cards with my dad, granddad and uncle, while Hilda, mum and I would sit and talk and listen to the radio or to records like Nelson Eddy and so on. Then, having had supper, they would go home.

We went up to shows in London sometimes and I remember going to see 'Me and my Girl' with Jim. Things got a little more serious between Jim and I, and I went over to Bexley to his parents' house, having got to know them and his brother through seeing them at Hilda's.

During the war when you got to the age of 21 you had to go into one of the Forces, the Land Army or a factory. I joined the W.A.A.F. and Hilda the A.T.S. at the end of 1941, thus making our own choice. Cissie had already gone into the Land Army, as her father had died when she was fourteen and her mother had remarried and gone to live in Gloucester. Cissie had to leave school and go to work, as her mother needed the money. So we all went our different ways, but then still came back to Plumstead on leave and met up again, and if possible went dancing together.

Jim was in what they called "a reserved occupation", which meant that you were of more use to the country working where you were. He worked for Vickers Armstrong and he was sent up to their works in Newcastle. I was posted to Gloucester and then to St Athan's in Wales, which meant we were all split up even more. While I was in Gloucester I was able to meet up with Cissie again, not having seen her since she left school. When we were on leave, if it was possible, we all met up again in Plumstead of course.

In 1943 Jim and I decided to get married. So in July we all made our way back to Plumstead once again, and with Hilda and Joyce as my bridesmaids, and Frank as Jim's best man, we got married. We went to Torquay for our honeymoon. Then we all went off to different places to get on with life during the war.

I got posted to various places and then to No46 Group Headquarters at Harrow. Here everyone was billeted with local residents. Nowhere could be found for me when I arrived, so I was billeted with my parents in Plumstead and I had to travel to Hatch End every day. This I did until VJ Day in 1945 when I was discharged on "compassionate grounds", as I was pregnant. I then went up north to join Jim. We came home to my Mum's when Brenda was born at the end of the year. Once again we walked over the fields with the pram, this time to Bexley to see the other grandparents, doing what we had done before the war.

We came back to Plumstead in 1947 when Jim was sent back to Crayford where he had worked before. We lived with my parents for two years whilst trying to find somewhere to live and finally moved to Gravesend to live in a new house and start a new life. So it was the end of an era, but we could never forget Plumstead and our life there, not even now.

#### **A few more memories come to mind. (12th October 2006)**

When we lived in Marmadon Road I remember the Muffin Man coming round ringing his bell with his muffins for sale.

Also another man that used to come round selling his wares was the Shrimp, cockle and Winkle Man.

On Good Friday the baker came round with fresh hot cross buns for sale. The smell was lovely, and we couldn't wait to eat them; they usually followed the traditional dinner of fish, which we always had on Good Friday.

Then of course there was the rag-and-bone man with his horse and cart and his call of "Any old iron" and "Rag and Bone". Also the Walls Ice Cream man and his tricycle with the big square box in front with his cries of "Ice Cream" and if you were lucky you got one or a triangular iced 'lolly.'

*\*See also Iris's story: Blitz Over Plumstead.*

# *Janet Fagg's (nee Beal) Memories Of Plumstead.*

*Janet Fagg*

We moved there from Maidstone when I was six or seven, which would have been 1949/50. My parents shared a house with my grandmother but my grandmother decided to sell up and move in with her sister and we were virtually made homeless. Dad decided we would move to Plumstead as he had been born there in Villas Road.

Thus I moved from a nice 1930's semi in Maidstone with an indoor bathroom to a run down shop that had been a rag and bone shop in Hartville Road owned by Mr and Mrs Petkin. Mrs Petkin then lived at number 3 with her daughter after we moved in. We had an outside toilet and a concrete back yard and a Kitchener coal oven in the living room. Practically every Victorian kitchen had one in Victorian days. They had to be black-leaded. It warmed the room when you cooked on it. Ours was taken out and replaced by a gas stove.



*Janet aged about 11 outside the café.*



*Marilyn Attwood aged about 12.*

Mum and dad worked hard and turned it into Bell's cafe. It should have been Bill's cafe but the sign writer got it wrong and it was never corrected. Hartville Road was like Coronation Street and the cafe was like the Rovers Return. There was a grocery shop run by two brothers at the other end. Across the way in White Hart Lane was another grocers owned by Mr and Mrs Mitchell.

I had been educated at a private school in Maidstone but due to our circumstances I was sent to Conway Road Primary School.

My first memory in class 4A is of Marilyn Attwood sitting on her desk with an Oxo tin in her hands that contained her National Savings stamps. We are still friends to this day. Our teacher was Mrs Crouch who wore bright red lipstick.

Next year I was in class 3A with Mr Mockeridge. We were aware even in those days of our innocence that there was "something going on" with him and Miss Weekes. They

later married after we had left that school. At the end of the year the top ten pupils were put into class 1A for two years, skipping 2A. I was the tenth child and the nine in front of me were all boys. I sat at the back of the class with Brian Moore and was told to come and sit at the front with Marilyn Attwood (who had skipped 3A and then done class 2a and now, two years on, into class 1A like me). We had Mr Jenkins for two year. (He must have had a summer house at Whitstable because I saw him there once or twice in the 1960's.)

Marilyn and I used to spend school holidays either on Plumstead Common or going across the ferry at Woolwich to play on the swings in the park at North Woolwich.

I remember going to the Salvation Army in Glenside with Wendy Beckford and Joan Salter and we had some lovely outings from there.

We also went on both the Radical and Maybloom Club outings.

My parents decided to close the cafe. I think mum got fed up doing all the cooking and I remember her saying all dad did was lean on the counter and serve cups of tea! So they decided to close the shop and work elsewhere.

After they closed the cafe dad went to Kidbrooke to work for GPO Telephones (now BT) in Kidbrooke, near Blackheath. and mum worked at the bedding shop called 'Friendly Rest' in Plumstead High Street.

I remember going once a week to Plumstead Baths, as we had no bath at home until I was



*Workers at 'Friendly Rest' mattress factory, Plumstead High Street.  
From left to right they are my mum (Peggy), Theresa, Margaret and Eileen.  
Photo: Janet Fagg (nee Beal).*

fifteen and one was put in the kitchen. Mum got all the food for the cafe from the Co-op in Lakedale Road and we did so well out of the tin checks that I was clothed from the dividend payouts.

After I left Conway Road School Marilyn and I went to Aske's at New Cross, getting the 177 daily from the bottom of Gallosson Road. On the return journey we used to get off in the High Street

and, depending on the season, either got two cakes each from the cake shop or 3d of chips from the fish and chip shop. We used to eat these on the seats outside the Civil Defence Hut by the Cinema.

As a child I remember Saturday morning pictures, the smell of the books in Plumstead Library, playing in the street, watching the lads who came into the cafe go off to do National

Service and later on coming back men.

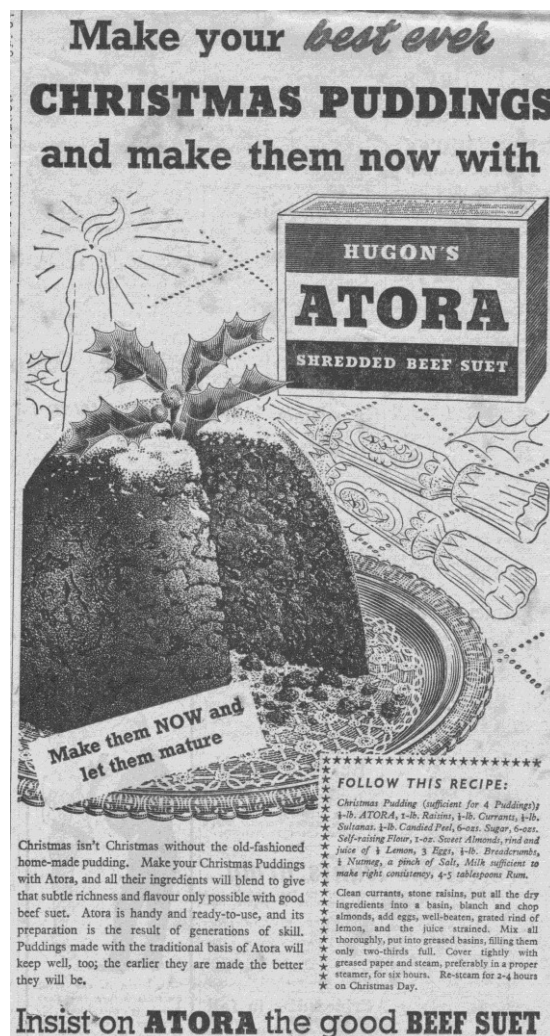
I remember our neighbours at number 3 were Mrs Reid and her mother Mrs Petkin, at number 7 was the Evan's family, and number 10 was Pat Jordan.

Mum used to get the bread for the cafe from the RACS and I have a photo of me on the horse drawn vehicle with the baker.

Some of our customers in the cafe in those days were men from the Water Board and the ladies from the flock factory in White Hart Lane. I remember walking our chow chow dog along the sewer bank that ran behind our houses. Our street was pulled down in the 60's and Glenside Road no longer seems to be on the map.

I remember children taking accumulators to the bagwash shop in the street behind Hartville Road and having to come home in dreadful pea-souper fogs in the winter. I remember having to assemble in the school hall on February 5th 1952 to have Mr Bull, the Headmaster, tell us the King had passed away. He was buried on my birthday, Feb 15th, I could not understand at the time why I was not allowed to have a birthday party!

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**CHRISTMAS PUDDINGS**  
and make them now with



**HUGON'S  
ATORA  
SHREDDED BEEF SUET**

Make them **NOW** and  
let them mature

\*\*\*\*\*  
**FOLLOW THIS RECIPE:**  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\* Christmas Pudding (sufficient for 4 Puddings)  
\* 1-lb. ATORA, 1-lb. Raisins, 1-lb. Currants, 1-lb.  
\* Sultanas, 1-lb. Candied Peel, 6-oz. Sugar, 6-oz.  
\* Self-raising Flour, 1-oz. Sweet Almonds, rind and  
\* juice of 1 Lemon, 3 Eggs, 1-lb. Bread-crumbs,  
\* 1 Nutmeg, a pinch of Salt, Milk sufficient to  
\* make right consistency, 4-5 tablespoons Rum.  
\* Clean currants, stone raisins, put all the dry  
\* ingredients into a basin, blanch and chop  
\* almonds, add eggs, well-beaten, grated rind of  
\* lemon, and the juice strained. Mix all  
\* thoroughly, put into greased basins, filling them  
\* only two-thirds full. Cover tightly with  
\* greased paper and steam, preferably in a proper  
\* steamer, for six hours. Re-steam for 2-4 hours  
\* on Christmas Day.

Christmas isn't Christmas without the old-fashioned home-made pudding. Make your Christmas Puddings with Atora, and all their ingredients will blend to give that subtle richness and flavour only possible with good beef suet. Atora is handy and ready-to-use, and its preparation is the result of generations of skill. Puddings made with the traditional basis of Atora will keep well, too; the earlier they are made the better they will be.

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# Jill Jupp Remembers

Jill Jupp

My earliest memories would start from around the early to mid 50's when I would have been five years old. I recall quite clearly my first day going to school, with mum walking me through the Common past the tennis courts, down the hill, across the road and up a slope to St Margaret's School. I made a friend that day who has remained my best friend to this day. I also recall the boy who sat at the desk behind me dipping one of my braids into his inkwell and, as I had very blonde hair, it really showed up. I remember my mum going quite nutty when she came to pick me up in the afternoon.

TV Comes to Plumstead Common Road.

The Year is 1952 and I would have been turning six at the end of the year. I remember the Coronation Day quite well, mainly, I think because of the great excitement of watching it on TV, something that, at this point, my parents did not have. The Townsend's, a neighbour's house, consisting of four sisters and their father, had just purchased a TV set. They had a big old sheep dog by the name of Laddie. I remember laying stretched out on the floor with him and my brother Stuart, eating Marmite sandwiches and drinking fizzy orange that they would make for us on many a happy afternoon after school.

Anyhow, after that venture, it became quite a habit for my brother and I to go and watch children's hour at their house after school. Thinking back I recall Rin-Tin-Tin, Cisco Kid, Hop'along Cassidy and many others, all watched with much childish anticipation and excitement. This went on even after my parents got their own TV set.

I have such happy memories of that time in my life. (The youngest sister is still living there to this day. (2006)



# Joan Doling Reminiscences

*Joan Smith (nee Doling)*

I was born in March 1943 and I lived at 50 Lakedale Road, Plumstead. Conway School was my primary school and Waverley was my secondary school.

**Approximately in 1950** I think it was, my cousins and I took my nan's wooden scrubbing board up to Plumstead Common and used it as a sledge to sleigh down the hills in the snow. Needless to say, it broke and we couldn't take it home for fear of the consequences. We never owned up and, despite her searching and her inquiring, she never did find her scrubbing board!

**1946** I started Sunday School at Cage Lane Mission, Lakedale Road. At the Christmas parties there was a lovely big Christmas tree and we had doll's furniture made by Mr and Mrs Wood of Edison Grove.



*Cage lane Mission (1905.)*

*Photo: Greenwich Heritage Centre.*

*(The cobbled drive on the right was the entrance to Beasley's Brewery).*

For fourteen years I attended this church and they were very happy ones. Later I became a Sunday School teacher with my friend, Jeanette Stapleton, who to this day remains a dear friend.

Each year we went to the seaside, i.e. Margate, Broadstairs; and I can remember sitting in the hall waiting for our coach number to be read out, whilst my mum ran down to the baker's to get fresh rolls for our lunch. Each week we had paid a few pennies to save up for this event.

We held our sports days with Cage Lane Mission near Mr Bull's house on Winn's Common.

Mrs Wright formed the Girls' Life Brigade and we went with the People's Hall Church to Broadstairs and we slept on straw mattresses in St Mildred's School.

**Approximately 1949** I remember attending the Co-op Hall to go to a playgroup run by a Mrs Whines of Lakedale Road. I only went once; I did a head over heels and broke my arm. I never went again.

**Regarding the Co-op Hall:** I remember waiting with my mum for our 'divi' cheques to be counted, to claim our dividend pay out.

**1947** I started school at Conway Infants' School. On that morning I remember having a bath in an old tin bath in the kitchen and my mum putting a drill slip on me. It was green. We wore long brown stockings held up with elastic bands, a thick vest and some kind of white coat with buttons down the front. My mum and I stood in the hall and waited our turn to be registered.

At school I remember sleeping in a little bed in the afternoons. The teacher said, "Look for a camp bed with a squirrel on." I had no idea what a squirrel looked like! If you did sleep you were rewarded with sweets.

Later, in another class, we collected tins of beads and we used to exchange them. We were also taught how to knit and sew.

I was in Miss Moye's, Miss Nicholson's, Miss Lloyd's, Mr Mockeridge's Mr Legg's and Mr Jenkins' classes, Miss Widger and Mr Bull being the Head teachers.

During the polio outbreak I remember a boy from our school caught polio and, unfortunately, he died from it.

From my house, which was just a few doors up from the Cage Lane Mission Hall, you could hear the school bell, rung by Mr Harrison, every morning at 8.45 am.

I met my friend Molly Smith here, who is still a close friend. We went to tap and ballet classes and performed in the annual school show at Christmas. We tapped to the tune of the 'Black and White Rag' by Winifred Atwell, and Mr Jenkins, our teacher, played the piano. He never did get his fingers around that music.

Mr Mockeridge and Miss Weeks were fond of each other and I often had to take and deliver written messages between them.

We went to Sandown, on the Isle of Wight, for two weeks and it cost six pounds ten shillings. Each week we paid a few shillings towards the cost of our trip.

Every Friday we watched films in the Art Room. They were 'stills' and Mr Jenkins ran a commentary.



*The R.A.C.S. Department Co-op store in the process of being demolished with its clock tower spire roof removed.*

*Photo: Alan Gibbs.*

I remember sitting watching the staff of St Nicholas Hospital playing tennis and the fair on Plumstead Common, near the paddling pool.

Every Sunday my dad took me for a walk, whilst my mum cooked the Sunday roast at home. We also went to the rock gardens (Rockcliffe Gardens) near Plumstead Cemetery. Then, when we returned home and had dinner, we would listen to the Billy Cotton Band Show. I went to the Cage Lane Sunday School at 3 pm and then, back at home after tea, we would listen to the Archie Andrew's Show with "Educating Archie" on the old valve radio.



Conway School, 1953. See following list for names of the pupils.

Back row from left to right

Brian Radman, Diane Broadshaw, Linda Davis, Ruth Hobbs, Pat Chapman, Gail Nye, Dorothy Howe, Gwynis Cooper, Pamela Herbert, Sylvia Buttsworth, Jean Howden.

Middle Row from left to right

Susan Hamlin, John Pearce, David Glenon, Terry Blackmore, Neil Willis, Tony Alcom, George Colgate, Terry Grimsley, ? Frances, Gail Bradley,

Bottom Middle row from left to right:

Linda Vinton, Victor Harris, Ann Stannard, Peter Doan, Gail Maynard, Paul Finch, Gaeley Smiley, Arnold Answorth, Gwen Salter, Norman Bryan and Gill Elson.

Bottom row from left to right

Joan Doling (me), Pamela Taylor, Pat Jernaway, Pamela McEilroy and Helen Smith.

Later on, when I was married, at St Mark's Church in 1966, my dad used to take my two daughters over the Common to the swings every Sunday for many years (I now have three little granddaughters)

I remember, when I was about six, having a second hand pram from Wright's of Plumstead High Street for Christmas. My dad had spruced it up and my mum made all the covers and so on for it. It was dark blue and beautiful. The first time I wheeled it up Lakedale Road some boys at the top hurled a tyre down the road and it bowled into the pram, squashing it down like a concertina, knocking me over with such great force, the pram also hitting me and the heavy lorry tyre rolling over my stomach. As I lay there hurt and stunned, I remember hearing a neighbour, who had come out from the back door of their Tewson Road house, call out to my mum "Give her a strong cup of tea with plenty of sugar in it."

My dad made me a scooter. It was painted green and made of wood and I would ride it to the corner and back. He also made me a wooden duck and a blackboard and easel.

My first pram was made from a wooden crate. My first doll was made out of rags by my mum.

Florence Terrace had a shop at the bottom of our road and there was a paper shop just past the Brewery Tap.



*Early photos of Joan Doling with family and friends*

**Top Left:** (left to right) Molly Smith, Margaret Hobbs, Joan Doling, outside Cage Lane Mission about 1956.

**Top right:** Cage Lane Mission Sunday School Outing, Easter 1957.

Names are:

**Back row:** Bert Hobbs (Uncle), Christopher Wye, June Jerrom, Diane Parker, Tony Jefferies, My Mum & Dad, Denise Rarer.

**Middle row:** Rita Core, Jean Gowland, Diane Rufus, Terry Rogers, Lily Hobbs (Aunt), Ruth Hobbs (Cousin)

**Front row:** Pauline Harris, Molly Smith, Jeanette Stapleton, Me, Carole Marsh.

**Bottom Left photo:** (left to right) Joan Doling & Ruth Hobbs, about 1946.

**Bottom middle:** Outside my House, 50 Lakedale Road, two doors up from Cage Lane Mission, about 1951.

**Bottom right:** Joan Doling and her best friend Molley Smith in back garden, August 1951. Note the Anderson air raid shelter on right.

I also remember the Salvation Army marching down Lakedale Road to White Heart Lane where their headquarters were.

Saturday mornings were when all the kids went to the pictures at the bottom of Lakedale Road. But my parents wouldn't ever let me go because they said that the place was full of germs!

1953 We bought our first television on H.P., from a shop in Plumstead High Street, to watch the Queen's Coronation. We invited some of the street to come and watch it with us.

I remember my friends from Lakedale and Tewson Roads always attended Firework Night on the bombsite at St Nicholas Hospital.

In the summer, as kids, we used to take our jam sandwiches and water and have picnics round the big tree at the top of Lakedale Road and paddle in the pool at the top of the Common. Later on, as young growing girls, I remember the summer times on the Common, watching the cricket on the cricket pitch, Sunday afternoon walks through the tennis courts and Saturday afternoons spent with my friends playing with a bunch of lads near St Mark's Church.

New year I remember all the noise from the hooters of the ships along the Thames and the colourful fireworks display.

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DEE! SUMMER CATALOGUE

# *John Ball Recalls*

I was born in 1943 and my sister Margaret was two years younger than I. We lived in Chestnut Rise with all my brothers and sisters; there were six of us.

We all went to Conway but after Conway we went to different secondary schools.

Chestnut Rise, formally Chestnut Road, which could have previously been named Chestnut Hill, was, even for a young lad, a tough walk up from the Lakedale road area.

When my friends and I were old enough and we had enough money to get bicycles, mine was the only one without any gears and for me the only easy way to make it up Chestnut was to zig zag back and forth across the steep road.

The walk to Conway school was all down hill and you had more time to take in the surroundings. I lived opposite the Woolwich Borough Council yard, a wonderful playground when the yard was closed up for the day! These yards housed all manner of vehicles and in particular I recall two large green steam engines. These would emerge early in the mornings with their noisy clambering steel rollers, chuffing and puffing out of the council yard, off to do some road repairs somewhere in the borough, sometimes pulling a wagon and always the oily rag being tossed about in the large front roller, presumably to help keep it clean.

Down at the bottom end of Chestnut Rise, across Brewery Road to the top of Orissa Road the first house always had the front door open. I can't recall who lived there but in those days it seemed that open doors were not a problem then.

Across the other side of Orissa, Beasley's Brewery took up the entire length of the street, as it also did at the end of Conway to Lakedale Roads. I particularly recall a window situated at pavement level protected by wire mesh. Peering in you would see a light bulb that lit an area above a small workshop bench. Here two men would usually be working away in at a large bench vice and doing other maintenance work. I recall how one of these gents remind me of a character played by Ronnie Barker, with his cloth cap and small round wire glasses. Sometimes we'd chat to the men below in their work room when this window was open.

A little further on along from this window there was the jib with pulley wheel and a large wooden door situated high up above where the carts and lorries would be unloaded when they delivered the "ingredients" for the beer making. These supplies would be hoisted aloft and then swung into the building. There was always a smell wafting around here, perhaps of the hops. Further down the road in the brewery building were some large rooms where, with our little noses pushed to the windows, we would watch the men wash down the area with hoses. At the corner of Orissa and Conway were the stable areas, but the walls were too high and the animals were away from our view.

More smells here, but not so pleasant!

Onwards to Galloson and into Conway School, perhaps passing the rag and bone man and a chance maybe of making a penny.

Along with a friend who also went to Conway School we visited it two years ago. (2004) We were made very welcome and were given a tour of the school. The school had changed very little. The outside toilets had gone and there was a small new extension but overall the school had not changed that much. In particular the small narrow cloakrooms were still used

for the same purpose and it was very strange standing there taking it in.



In the photo, left, I am sitting on my fathers motorbike (a Bartlett I think) with my sister Margaret pillion, on the front path of 48 Chestnut Rise. My father never could and never did ride the motorbike. Also in the photo is Bobby Fram who lived at 44. He is playing cricket across the road using the wall pillar as a wicket.

You could not do this now as when

I visited Chestnut Rise last year (2004) the road was of course choked with cars. My old house was converted into flats too.

Bob's father owned either a large Matchless or AJS, which he kept in the front garden. His father also bred budgerigars and a room on the rear grand level of the house was given up to house them!



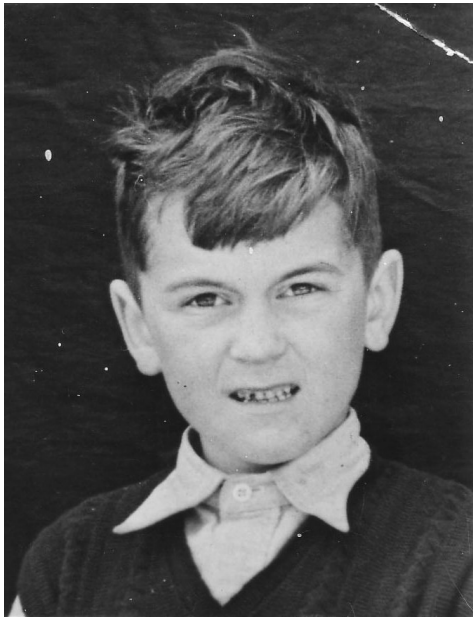
*This photo, left, was taken in the back garden of my neighbours the Chamber's.*

*I am centre at the back and my sister Margaret is first left and my brother Graham next to her.*

*The Chamber's lived at 50 Chestnut and moved to a road off of Princess Road in Dartford.*

*Their new house was a semi detached and had a side entrance and also had French Doors.*

*I thought they were rich! I also thought they lived in the Country for although you could get the LT Trolleybus 696 most other transport was Greenline etc.*



*Me at Conway age about six or seven.*



*And at Plum Lane aged about 11 or twelve. Note the tartan shirt, probably bought from a School holiday in Scotland.*

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# John Bottle Remembers

John Bottle

I lived at 1 Armstrong Place, Woolwich from 1932 (my birth) to about 1940 when we all moved to Cornwall.

Our house was at the end of a terrace. Armstrong Place was a rectangular street running round a squarish block of buildings in the middle. It was a lovely little community where everyone knew each other and no doors seemed to be locked and help was always on hand from neighbours. But so was retribution if we children became wayward, so it was (in my memory) a very safe place to live and play.

Now all those 3-up 3-down houses are gone, replaced by several tower blocks and I imagine that the lives of the current children cannot compare with ours!

I do not remember a great deal. The Armstrong Gun pub was on the corner of Vincent Road and Armstrong Street, just a couple of minutes walk away and was dad's local. I remember occasionally going there to get a jugful of beer (from the "Bottle and Jug" door) and bringing it home for him. I assume an adult came with me, but I do not remember any. Around the corner from the Armstrong Gun, in Vincent Road, was a tobacconist and we young children would often buy cigarettes for dad there. You could buy Woodbine cigarettes in packets of five in those days and I think it was Kensitas which had little compartments of 4 cigarettes stuck on their packets of 20's. I have not seen those since.



*The Armstrong Gun (the local pub) Darts Club members "Roll of Dishonour".*

Sometimes for a treat on Sunday evenings we would all go to a large pub on the North bank of the river and watch the day-tripper boats returning from down river.

We would sit in the beer garden with crisps and lemonade and mum and dad would have their grown-up drinks. It all seemed very grand and exciting to a six year old.

We used to play in the streets all the time. There were few cars and most of the large deliveries were made by horse and cart. I can remember large blocks of ice being brought around (I have no idea where they were being delivered), carried on a man's back using a large pair of iron pincers to hold the block, but with only a cut sack to insulate him from the ice. The sack was slit up one side and he wore it much like a hood, draping over his back. All

the ice deliveries were done in this way and the ice on the cart was kept cold only by having lots of sacks laid on the top. We of course always tried to get small lumps of ice to suck.

"Hanging off the back" of carts and the occasional lorry was great fun. You would run after the cart, jump up and catch hold of the back and hold on as long as you could. In our little square, the driver could not get up much speed so when we eventually fell off no one ever seemed to get hurt.

I cannot remember many names. Our next door neighbours were called Keilly (not sure about the spelling). A friend Peter Kitts lived in Armstrong Street. Another boy was called Dennis Blackman. One family was called Uglow. I think I remember that there was a family called English (your "Woolwich Childhood" is by Wynne Handley nee English).

*The photo (right) is of me and my twin sisters, Phyllis (on my right) and Betty, outside our house. It was decorated for the 1937 Coronation of George VI.*

Street entertainers used to come around, trying to earn money. Sometimes it would be a disabled soldier with a barrel organ and perhaps a monkey on his shoulder, sometimes it would be a group of men, dressed up in

various costumes and doing comic turns, singing, dancing and playing music. German bands were popular with us children, they made lots of noise and looked impressive.

We used to go on communal day trips, usually to the seaside somewhere. I think my dad organised some of these. A grand "char-a-banc" (a bus or a large open car with many seats) would arrive and lots of neighbours would pile in. Invariably there would be a pub stop on the return journey.

I used to go to Burrage Grove School, but when war broke out I remember that we used to have lessons given by our teachers in private houses. This may have been done in case the school was bombed. We went to different people's houses at different times and they could



teach only a few children at a time because of the small rooms, so we must have missed a lot of schooling, but of course we had very concentrated teaching this way.

When the bombing started, barrage balloons were put up around in certain places and anti-aircraft guns would sometimes be towed into the street and fired and of course the houses shook with all the noise. However, the following morning we children would be out, scouring the streets for shrapnel. I built up quite a collection. Pieces with numbering or lettering on them were particularly prized. Walking into Woolwich the morning after a raid was memorable. I can still smell the acrid smoke coming out of burned and gutted buildings, hose-pipes all over the street, charred beams projecting from bare walls like bones and the indescribable chaos of fallen walls, broken furniture and black muddy dirt everywhere.



We slept in the Anderson air-raid shelter that dad built in the back garden. He had to destroy his garden to build it, which must have been difficult for him. The shelter was made of corrugated iron, with straight sides, which curved over to form a roof, and flat ends. It was set into a hole in the ground, so you had to step down to get into it. We slept on bunks, but it must have been a tight squeeze to get two adults and three children (my brother was away in the RAF by then) into a space about 6ft square. For me it was a wonderful adventure.

*My dad, Charles Edward Bottle, in our back garden, in front of the air raid shelter, holding some of our soft toys. It must have been taken at a weekend when he was not at work.*



*My elder brother, Kenneth Charles Bottle, standing in almost the same place as dad in the above photo. At least it gives an idea of the dreary outlook at the back of these houses, but they were home to us.*

*Ken became a RAF pilot; he was killed during the war.*

# *Joyce Foster Remembers*

*Joyce Hyne*

I was born in Reidhaven Road in 1923 and lived there until I was ten. I can recall lots of fond memories there.

I attended school in Conway Road. One day my friend and I walked home for lunchtime, past the Co-op stores in Lakedale Rd. On the corner were stacked big round wicker baskets, full of shiny red cherries. On impulse, we upped our dresses and filled them with handfuls of cherries. Knowing we daren't go home with them, we went up the Common, beside the lake (paddling pool) and ate the lot. (A luxury for us as I came from a poor family. Nine of us lived in two rooms and we shared a scullery.) Needless to say, I was punished for being late home for dinner and did not get anything to eat.

The landlady took pity on me and gave me a piece of cake, but I was sent back to school, walking along eating the cake and sobbing and crying, all at the same time. I arrived at school very late and had to stay in the Headmistress's room with my hands on my head, facing a corner, for the rest of the afternoon. So I paid a price for taking those cherries!

One day I overheard an aunt of mine talking to my mother. She used to work at Holdsworth's flock factory in Whitehart Lane. (They made the old clothes into flock that was then used to make the flock mattresses.) She used to do the sorting of old clothes and occasionally find the odd bit of loose money in pockets and save it up and take it to the bank. The only 'bank' us kids knew of was the sewer 'bank' that ran from Plumstead Bridge alongside the Woolwich Arsenal to Crossness. We played there for hours during the long school holidays looking for where she had hidden the money.

Another pastime was pushing my brother and friends up Garibaldi Street on a plank of wood with four pram wheels. For this privilege I was allowed to sit on it going down. It's a wonder we weren't all killed; but not much traffic in those days; although I can remember flocks of sheep being driven through our roads.



*Joyce Hyne, nee Foster, on holiday in 2005  
aged 85.*



*Joyce Foster (now Hyne) 'Our Gang', herself (left) with some of her brothers & sisters, in back garden, Reidhaven Road, Plumstead, 1934.*

Another delight was watching a travelling show of a barrel organ and a troop of four or five men dressed up as women. They wore large yellow dresses. We thought that they were wonderful and followed them around all the other streets (All a good free show for us poor kids.) They would collect money from folk as they went around the streets but I don't think they got much as we were all poor.

The Cat's Meat Man used to do better; he was like the pied piper, followed by moggies though, not kids!

Every Monday I used to go with my nan to the pawn shop with granddad's best suit and shoes. The shop was near the Plaza cinema, going towards the baths and museum. Then the same on Friday, this time to redeem the clothes, so that he was well dressed to spend the W/E in the Radical Club.

Round the corner from home was a second hand shop named Petkin's. If anybody had new clothes on we'd say they were like 'Petkin's Mannequins'. He also bought jars and bottles, which he stored in his back yard. I can recall the boys searching the rubbish dump for them. They sold them to him and then they'd jump over the back wall into his yard and get them back again and then resell them back to him!



*Bell's Café, which was once Petkin's second hand shop. The photo is of Janet Fagg whose family owned the café.*

Every Sunday afternoon us kids who were old enough were sent round to the Sunday School at the Salvation Army in Marmadon Rd. They were very good to us kids. When dad lost his job at Tate & Lyle, across the Woolwich Ferry, he was sent to a 'Centre' to work, in Dartford.

In them days, no work, no money! We did have a 10 shilling voucher, enabling mum to shop at Morgan's in Lakedale Road.

There used to be the 'Tally Man'. He walked the streets with a big old battered suitcase, selling kids' clothes and other clothes that you could buy on the tick, by paying the bill off at a few pennies a week. (This money owing was then all 'tallied' up on your bill in the 'book' each week).

We went on a school outing to Herne Bay once; it cost 1/9d; wonderful! Also, each year we went with the Radical Club to Sheerness by train. They gave each one of us 12 pennies, a 1/- (10 p) in an envelope. Very rich indeed!

On icy mornings an old man named Mr Baxter used to stand outside his shop on the corner of Avery Street and give us children a Bulls Eye each (a black and white striped sweet).

Some evenings we went to a play at the centre in the High Street School, opposite the Plaza Cinema.

There was also an 'Indian Toffee' seller. (I never ever did find out what it was in his tin box that he hung round his neck!)

Then on Sundays we had the 'Muffin Man' with his big tray of muffins. He'd ring his bell and call out loudly, "Muffins", always on a Sunday afternoon, when a lot of the folk were having their Sunday afternoon nap; when they would be, "bleeding disturbed," by him! I recall the Shrimp & Winkle seller who came around the streets and also the 'Stop me and buy one' Wall's Ice Cream Man, on his tricycle complete with its icebox. You could buy a triangular stick of coloured frozen ice lolly, about 10" long for a penny or he would cut it in half for a halfpenny. You'd get your dress real messy as it melted in your hand as you ate and sucked at it, as it didn't have a stick through it.

I remember the \*Hokey Pokey Man as well and also the rude rhyme that us cheeky kids would sing, when well out of earshot of our parents. We'd sing:

"Hokey Pokey, penny a lump! Just came out the elephant's trunk.

Hokey Pokey, penny a glass! Just came out the elephant's...." As I'm quite sure, you can fill in the missing word!

Occasionally, for a treat, we'd go across the Woolwich Free Ferry for a trip. We would go for a paddle in the Thames at Victoria Park; very healthy!



*Kids paddling in the Thames 1920's.*

Talking of health, I remember when all us kids in our family got very ill. My mum took all of us six kids and pushed a big old pram all the way up to the Memorial Hospital, Shooters Hill.

But we were not admitted 'cos we all had a contagious illness; I think it was scabies or ringworm. We were told to go to *\*\*Goldie Leigh's Home* instead. It was a very long way from Shooters Hill, especially for all us little kids and my mum pushing the pram. When we got to the Home, adjacent to Bostall Woods, we were all admitted and we had a lovely time during our long stay there, which I think was quite a few weeks.

On just about every street corner there was a small shop. One day mum sent me across for 2 ounces of 'All Sorts'. On the way back temptation was just too great, so I ate one, but she knew that 2 ounces meant six sweets and I came back with only five. I was sent straight back to the shop and, in deep shame, I said that I wasn't given the correct weight.

The shopkeeper knew what had happened though and took pity on me and replaced it.

I remember May 24th was *\*Empire Day* and the ceremony in the playground at Conway Primary School. Then the singing of "Land of Hope and Glory" ending with a half day holiday and the kids running happily out of the school gate.

When I was eleven we moved to Eltham. Mum was talking to the woman next door and I was listening. "There was three bedrooms, two living rooms, a bathroom (what's that?) and a big hall". The only hall we knew as kids was the school hall! (What a disappointment). "And you had to go around 'a roundabout' to get there!" You can guess, the only roundabout we knew was at the fair on Bostall Heath, or the one on the back of the Rag and Bone man's cart. (You got a free ride if you gave him a jam jar or some old clothes; not that I ever got a ride though as the only old clothes that my family had we was wearing!)



*Jubilee Street Party, Reidhaven Road, Plumstead, 1937? The girl second on left leaning forward, with dark hair, is Olive Pollard.*

*Editor's note:*

*\*Empire Day was an occasion of national celebration for Britain every May 24th, from 1908 until 1958.*

*\*Hokey Pokey was a cheaply made ice cream made from shaved ice mixed with syrup, giving it a yellow colour.*

*\*\*See: 'Goldie Leigh Hospital' story.*



# Julie, nee Lawrence, Remembers

Julie Lawrence

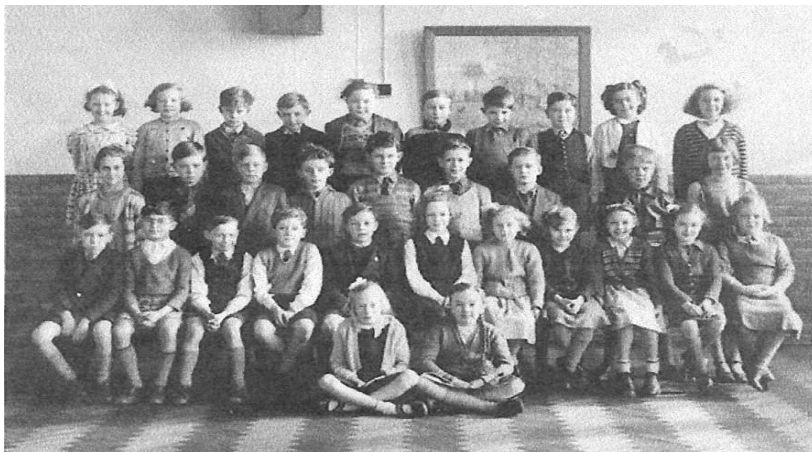


Walmer Terrace. My Dad & Uncle with our new car in 1963  
*Walmer Terrace, taken outside our house, with my dad's new car. Shortly after this we moved to Abbey Wood as they demolished our houses to make way for flats and maisonettes.*

I was born in Plumstead, in Walmer Terrace.

I was at Conway Road School from 1947 to 1957. My twin sister Jeanette Lawrence also went to Conway Road, but we were not always in the same class.

I remember buying wagon wheels from the shop on the corner of Conway and Orissa Roads, sneaking out of school at lunchtime, which wasn't allowed, and we went up to the bombsite by St Nicholas Hospital. We all climbed to the top of the wall to be nosey and when it was my turn somebody saw me and I jumped off the wall and



*Julie's class, Conway Primary, c.1955.*

sprained my ankle. I had to fib about how I sprained my ankle.

I sprained my ankle another time by jumping down a whole flight of stairs in the school. We used to hold hands and run and jump.

I also remember one of my friends (no names mentioned) pinching

sweets from the sweetshop in Lakedale Road.

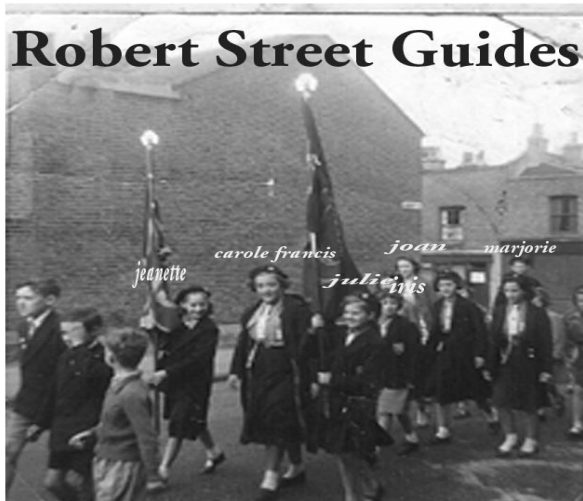
One time I was off sick from school when I had scarlet fever, which was highly contagious, and I had to go to the Brook Hospital and be isolated. Only my mum and dad were allowed to visit. (Little did I know I would spend over 36 years working in a hospital.)

Because of my time spent in hospital I missed learning my Roman numerals and to this day I don't know them.

One interesting story I recall was when I was on my way to school (Crown Woods, aged about 13) and as I approached Elmley Street, there was a lot of commotion. The milkman's horse had been scared by a dog barking as it was coming down Elmley Street and the horse bolted.

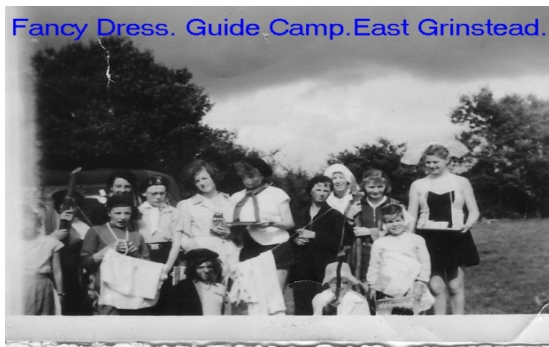
The milkman managed to jump off the milk wagon just before the horse went crashing

through the fence and down the embankment of the railway line. It was a sad sight seeing the horse lying down the bottom of the embankment. I don't know if it was killed instantly or they had to put it down.



*Betty Hawkins and myself carrying the flags.*

leaders would take it in turn to carry the flags; these were quite heavy for the girls to carry. After the parade we had to attend church. The organ would have to be pumped with air, I think from bellows: this was a job given to the Boy Scouts to perform. My eldest sister was in the church choir and she had to wear blue robes with a large white collar.



*Above: Our Guide Captain was Miss Collins who died a few years ago aged around 90.  
Below: Guide Camp. On the blanket is Barbara, Helen, Jeanette and Carol.*

My mother worked in a shoe shop, Dolcis in Hare Street, down by the ferry. She was a part time cleaner and I used to visit her there in the school holidays. She cleaned the brass on the front of the shop and it gleamed!

The shop specialised in the cheaper priced shoes; I used to try them all on. The lady she worked with was called Bayne who went on to marry a fellow who owned a fish stall in the market at a fairly old age of, I think, about 50; I remember going to the wedding.

Once a month we had to attend a church parade. All the Guides and Scouts met at the top of Robert Street, outside the Co-op, and we would march around the block. The

We also attended Sunday School every Sunday afternoon. When it was Mother's Day we were given a little posy of flowers, primroses or daffodils, to take home to our mothers.

When we had to learn our badges for the Guides we sometimes used the grounds of the church; this is where we learnt to light a fire with a few twigs and two pieces of wood rubbed together.

We enjoyed going to Camp with the Guides. We all went on the back of a lorry; this was loaned to us by the fish yard at the bottom of Robert Street. We had our kit bags, loaned to us by our fathers who had returned from war. We also took blankets and blanket pins (enormous safety pins) to hold our blankets together, no sleeping bags in those days.

When we got to the site we had to put our own tents up; there were about five to a tent. There were no toilets, just holes in the ground, which

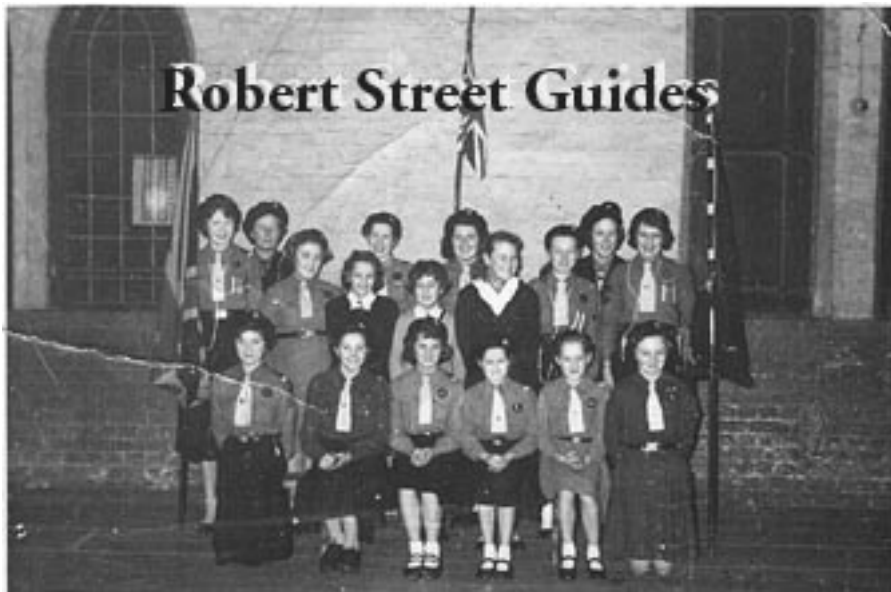
we had to dig out.

In the evenings we had a large campfire, where we all sang songs and ate sausages and beans.

The wasps were always a problem, especially as one of the main ingredients of our sandwiches was jam. One of the girls got stung badly on her tongue.

Once a week we had a midnight feast. We waited for the packages to come from our parents, then, when the captain was asleep, we would light our torches and tuck into our feasts.

We also had a fancy dress; there were some very innovative ideas, as we were only allowed to use items around us. We always had a good time at Guide camp.



*In the church hall.*

My memories of Conway Road School are of playing in the playground on the raised bit opposite the girls' toilets.

We used to play Jacks; we also played rounders in the playground, where we were given a coloured sash to wear to denote what team we were in.

May Day was a special occasion as we had been practising for weeks to get the dancing right. On the day we all wore our best dresses, mainly white, and had ribbons put in our plaits or in our ringlets. Our ringlets were formed from pieces of rag that had been torn into strips, wrapped around portions of our hair at night, which we slept in and were then taken out in the morning, resulting in lovely ringlets, uncomfortable to sleep in though.

Then the maypole was put up, and all our practising came to fruition as we held the ribbons and glided in and out of each other, as the ribbon made a pattern down the maypole. We then had to reverse our actions to un-weave the ribbons.

Mr Reeves was my favourite teacher at school.

I was always sorry that I missed out on learning my Roman numerals because of my getting scarlet fever. It was a dangerous infectious disease in those days. I remember not feeling

well, and my mother took me to Doctor Wright, who had her surgery in Glyndon Road. I apparently had a high temperature and other symptoms. She advised us to go straight home and wait for the ambulance.

I was taken to the Brook Hospital and put in a room on my own, in isolation. Only my mother and father were allowed to visit me and they weren't allowed to bring anything in. My twin sister had to wait in the hospital grounds and she would wave to me. As I got a bit better I was moved to a room with other children who had whooping cough, and I was put in a cot, and, as I was around seven years old at the time, I was not very happy about this. I remember how the other children's constant coughing kept me awake.

My mother had to fumigate things at home, including my mattress. I think I spent about two weeks in hospital.



*Brook Hospital, Aerial view 1936.*



*Older style of heading from 1935.*

# *Keith Littlewood's Reminiscence:*

*Keith Littlewood*

Born in Raymere Gardens, Plumstead Common in 1952.

Went to Timbercroft School, and Crown Woods School, Eltham.

Moved to Shooters Hill, 1984, then out to Bexleyheath.

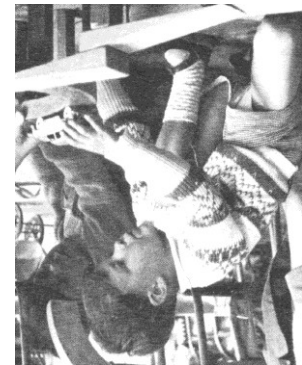
Reminiscence

When I was a small boy my paternal grandmother Emily Elizabeth Littlewood lived at the almshouses in Waverley Road, in Nelson Cottage, until she died in 1961, in her 80's. I visited her often with my mother Doreen for a cup of tea and a chat after shopping at the Links, and some Sundays we went with my father and sister Ann for tea, often playing cards. Gran enjoyed cards, and as she was very hard of hearing she spoke and laughed loudly. Her kitchen had an old sink, a store cupboard and a gas stove. She gave me her empty matchboxes for my push-along tipper lorry, and a thru'penny piece when we left for home.

Before we had a refrigerator, we went most days to the Slade shops, where I remember a grocer's, bakers, butchers, newsagents, an electrical shop, bookmakers, a hairdresser's, a wool shop, and two greengrocers! Paraffin for our heater, usually employed in the hall or bathroom, came from Kirkham Street or Alabama Street. Corner shops were everywhere. Coal was ordered from a merchant in Tuam Road and kindling wood for the open fire was bought at the corner shop at Nyanza Street off Garland Road, where I also remember buying five Players Weights cigarettes for my dad.

Next door to my grandmother's flat was a sweet shop and barber's, a dentist's run by Mr Morris, and a Post Office. From the dentist's waiting room you heard drilling noises from the old machinery, and he had a blue model racing car to distract the frightened patients.

Before school age there were many visits to the R.A.C.S. Links stores at Plumstead Common, where I remember a sweet shop, a shoe shop, a hairdresser's, a greengrocers, a butcher's, a baker's and a chemist's. Metal Co-op tokens (later plastic) were given out, and we returned them to the central office, next to the stairs to the hall above, for cash.



On my first day at the Infants in Timbercroft Primary School, in 1957, I had to be dragged inside by two teachers whilst I tried to kick them! I wanted my Mum. The room had tiny chairs, a sand pit, lots of toys, and also a toilet. I later enjoyed school, especially remembering the warm radiators when outside was cold and foggy in the winter, before the Clean Air Act brought smokeless fuel. In the 'smogs' we wore Balaclavas, and put scarves over our mouths to try not to breathe in the dirty air. You could only see a few yards ahead of you. In the top class Christopher Johnson sat in front of me, and has remained a lifelong friend. Our mothers had met when we were in prams at the child clinic in Garland Road, which I can remember later attending for some injections.

Chris lived in Pegwell Street, and on Saturday mornings we usually went for a walk with his

dog Tina, a lovely black mongrel. We would take her over Plumstead Common and Winn's Common to Bostall Heath, or up to Shrewsbury Park, Eaglesfield, and over to Oxleas Woods and Fields. We walked past the scrap yard on Bleak Hill, and down to Rockcliffe Gardens, a beautiful place of calm for a Sunday walk. I remember our family passing through the nearby rubbish dump, now open space, where the valley of Fanny on the Hill used to be, which was most unsightly.

Chris and I watched the RT buses on the many routes across the Common, especially noting 163's, which were RTL's from Camberwell Garage, and turned around in Swingate Lane and stopped at The Woodman. They sounded and looked different, and we noted the water can and tap provided for topping up the radiators at the bus stand. A photograph shows my grandfather William Henry Littlewood, who died in 1951, as an inspector in his 40's posing with the crew in front of a B type 54 bus from Hampstead outside the pub around 1920. My Dad, Henry Alfred Littlewood, born in Bassant Road in 1915, worked at Plumstead Garage as well as his father for a couple of years, after leaving Timbercroft School at 14, before working at Vickers in Crayford.

For one week all the buses normally using Plumstead Road were diverted due to a subsidence in the road, in about 1962. There were buses constantly arriving at The Ship bus stop, and going down Waverley Road with the 192's to Plumstead High Street.

I remember playing tennis at Plumstead Common with my sister Ann, and with Chris, and also going around the putting course with my Dad, or Chris and his father Douglas and brother Tony. We even used the public bowls green, but their woods were worn out of shape, so it was no good. I had another sister Joyce who later attended Burrage Road School.



*Burrage Road School 1952.  
Joyce Costin is seated bottom row,  
4th from the left.  
Photo: Ken Costin.*



*Old Mill Road Plumstead Common late 1940's.*

Once Doug skated on the ice at the paddling pool on Winn's Common, around New Year, and was reprimanded by the lady attendant! For some while after 1973 Chris, Douglas, a friend Mick Clisby and I played badminton at Plumstead Manor, 'The Warren' school, and met Len Thynne, who was a brilliant coach, able to move in any direction to hit the shuttle back effortlessly, and then return to his central position.

I have seen many changes here, and buildings like the Ascension Hall, our 10th Woolwich HQ at the top of Lakedale Road, demolished.

# *Ken Costin's Blast From The Past!*

*Ken Costin*

I was born in 1935 and so I well remember the war years as a young boy

I spent those wartime years collecting incendiary bombs and shrapnel.

I lived in Flaxton Road at the junction with Raymere Gardens.

We lost the roof off our house three times, but never moved out.

The first blast I am aware of was in Barden Street on 17th October 1940. This was alongside the Church of the Ascension and was about 300 yards from our house; it killed three people.

Around the corner in Alabama Street on 20 March 1941 2000 hrs, a High Explosive Land Mine exploded, killing 27 people. This was the first bomb I remember to blast damage doors ceilings and remove tiles off the roof of the house.

Sometime in the early 1940's a German plane, probably a bomber, crash-landed on Plumstead Common, near the Links RACS stores. You could sit in the cockpit for a fee, 6d? Does anybody else remember this?

On 23 June 1944 a V1 doodlebug fell around the corner destroying Numbers 8-14 Duncroft and again taking the tiles off our house and bringing down ceilings, doors and windows. This killed 5 people.

On 26th February 1945, at 0910 hours, a V2 rocket fell on 42-44 Duncroft Road. This killed 13 and injured 87. I was blown through the fence of Timbercroft School, from the blast of a V2 rocket. I was not seriously injured, so I ran back home to find all the windows broken, doors blown off and the roof damaged again. My sister was waiting at No. 157 for her school friend, John, who was getting ready for school, when the V2 exploded. John was blown over in the kitchen before he heard the blast from the rocket. Again, they also were not seriously hurt. My father had just turned into Duncroft Road; he was blown to the ground. He was on his way to visit two of his workman who were repairing war damage from the V1, on number 42 Duncroft. Unfortunately both the workmen were killed. They were:

Robert Allen Parvin and Thomas Alfred Thynne.

I believe that at least one of them came from Scotland. I remember being shown a Scottish newspaper, which had a full page of cartoon strips, the first I had seen.

Two things puzzle me:

Why were we going to school at ten minutes past nine?

I don't remember leaving home because of the damage.

**Here is a list of those killed in the incidents mentioned in this story.**

*17 October 1940, Barden Street.*

Alice Louisa BATTY

James Henry Daniel BATTY

James Henry William BATTY

*20 March 1941, Alabama Street, at 2000 hrs, a High Explosive Land Mine exploded*

William Alfred BILLINGHURST aged 61.

Emma Elizabeth BILLINGHURST, his wife, aged 60.

Philip James BILLINGHURST, their son, aged 26.

Louisa May BILLINGHURST, their daughter, aged 29.

Grace Elizabeth DENNISON, their elder daughter, aged 31 married to

Harry Alwen DENNISON.

Charles William CALLOW

Ethel Amelia CHURCH

Maurice Stanley GROOME

Eleanor Minnie NICHOLSON

Muriel Eleanor NICHOLSON

Constance Delicia PAGE

Albert Henry REEVES

Ann Kilby TAYLOR

Arthur Frederick TAYLOR

George Reginald TAYLOR

Annie Ethel THYNNE

Edith Deby VOICE

**23 June 1944, 8-14 Duncroft Road, at 0655 hrs, a V1 Doodlebug exploded killing 5 including:**

Elizabeth HARDMAN,

Joan KIRBY

Louise KIRBY

**26 February 1945, 40-45 Duncroft Road, at 0910 hrs, a V2 Rocket exploded, 13 killed, 87 injured.**

William Cyril George EDMONDS, Police Constable

Ethel Maude EDMONDS, his wife

Leslie George Bert EDMONDS

Neillie LUDLOW

William James LUDLOW

Helen Hanton LUSH (nee LUDLOW)

**Donald Walter LUSH, aged 11, a pupil of Timbercroft School.**

Winifred NEWTON

Robert PARVIN, building labourer

Thomas Alfred THYNME, building labourer

Ethel PENNELL

George                      Robert  
PENNELL

Amy Alice TILBURY



*Timbercroft School photo, taken in July 1946.*

*Top row 2nd from the right - Valerie Huddy .Bottom row (left to right) 3 - Anderson, 5 - Ken Costin, 7 - P. Watling, 11 - Susan Hedges, 12 - David Carrot.*



*Ancona School 1946. Seated on the ground, third boy from the right, without a tie is Ken Costin.*

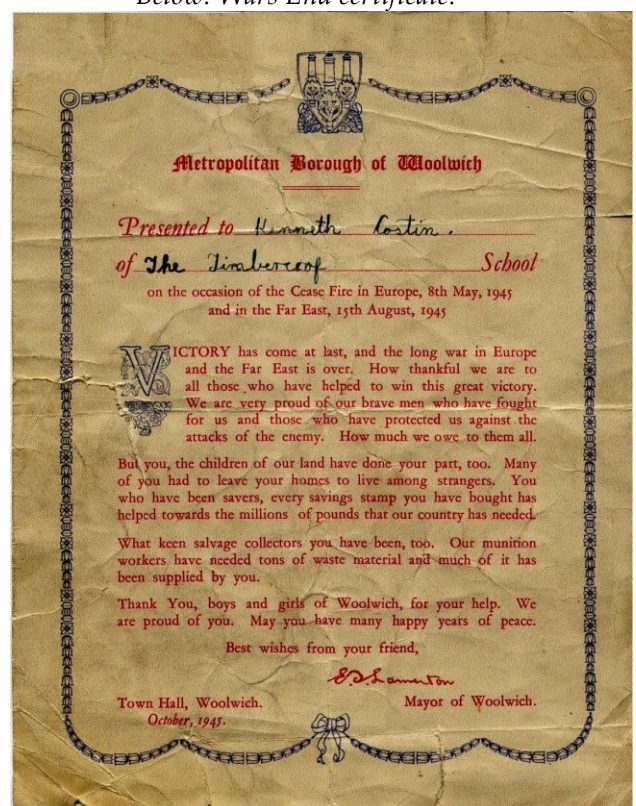
*Seated on chairs, second from the right is Eddie Brady (Uncle of Sandra Hilton (nee Lee) who sent in this information). He lived in Brewery Rd where his mother run a newsagent shop. Also on the same row but from the left 3rd boy in was called Peter Walters.*



Dig for Victory certificate from show at club grounds in Swingate Lane.



Above: Kevin's Empire Day certificate, 1940.  
Below: Wars End certificate.

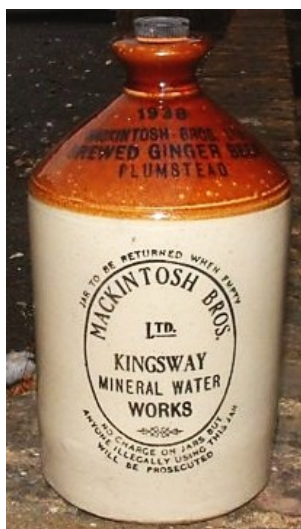


# King's Highway In The Early 1940's and 50's

John Redman

King's Highway was a fascinating place in the 1940s. I lived at number 46 King's Highway from 1945 until 1962, when I left to study at the Missionary training College of the WEC in Glasgow.

In those early days after the Second World War, it was not uncommon to see a coal-fired steam-powered lorry chugging its way up the hill. Our house had the Brick Field Cottages sign on the wall and was separated from the Alma pub by an unpaved road that led up to Macintoshes Mineral Water factory. As a lad of 15, I had a Saturday job working on one of Macintoshes lorries, making deliveries of lemonade, ginger beer and orange squash over quite a wide area. I still have one of the old stone ginger beer bottles that I treasure.



*MackintoshBros. one-gallon ginger beer stone jar*

On the other side of the house was the Cemetery Masons where they made all the gravestones and markers for the plots in the cemetery next door to them. My grandfather used to keep horses in the stable on our property and also for a period of time operated a fish and chip shop there, which I am told was quite successful.

We were quite accustomed to walking in those days. We thought nothing of walking up King's Highway to go to church at the Peoples' Hall Evangelical Church. I enjoyed being in the Life Boys and subsequently the Boy's Brigade. Playing in the Boy's Brigade Band was a special joy for me. It was at that church that I came to personal faith in Christ, an event that subsequently was to set the course for my whole life.

Winters during those early years often had heavy snowfalls and I clearly remember walking down the road through snow that was more than three feet deep. Nearby Bostall Woods was a great place to explore and we found many shells, shark's teeth and other reminders that at one time the whole area had been under water.

One of our favourite activities on Saturdays and school holidays was to go down to Woolwich and ride back and forth on the free ferry. I believe I rode most of the paddle steamers that were in service then and enjoyed watching all the other activities taking place on the river. Sometimes we'd deliberately exit on the north side and then walk back through the foot tunnel underneath the river.

Another delight was to visit Danson Park in Welling, go swimming at the lido, or row a boat on the lake. A member of the church owned and operated the miniature railway that ran alongside the lake. I enjoyed working on the engines in the morning, helping to grease the wheels of the carriages and then collecting the fares of the passengers. I believe it was sixpence for a ride.

After primary school at Wickham Lane I went as a junior to Bostall Lane School, later known

as Alexander Mcleod School. The last year of that was spent in a nearby annex owned by the Cooperative Society. From there I went to Addey & Stanhope Grammar School in Deptford.



*John aged five, making a tent at Wickham lane Primary School 1945.*

**Emma O'Brian** adds: My mother's grandmother lived at 67 King's Highway, Plumstead. Her name was initially Mrs Emily Holland; she then remarried a Mr George Round. My own mother attended Wickham Lane Secondary School from 1953-57. Her name is Valerie Holland. She recalls many a happy time walking to school down the "scary" lane, past the prefabs,

The other family that lived nearby (almost next door) were the Simmons family. My mother recalls that the house in question was opposite the Bus Garage, where her uncle (Ronald Holland) worked on the buses. Alice Simmons also ran a library from her house in Kings Highway. Does anyone remember this?

John Redman says, "My father used to visit the library run by Alice Simmons every Saturday evening, borrow some books to read and then go down to the corner shop – Snow's Newsagents I believe – to buy some sweets and bring them home for a special treat.

The houses that were called Brickfield Cottages were a little higher up, near to the Alma pub. There was a row of them going up toward Rockcliffe Gardens but they were demolished, probably around 1946.

*If anyone is interested in obtaining copies of the DVD of the Slade Church. Please contact : Michael Wright, 1 Irwin Avenue, Plumstead, London SE18 2HP*

# *Killed By Lightning*

*Brian Potter*

I lived in Wernbrook Street in 1936 up until the sixties. In around 1950 two of my friends were killed by lightning at Church Manorway in lower Plumstead. They were Army Cadets and were given a military funeral. It was recorded in the Sunday papers. Their names were Raymond Elliot and Albert Bish.

Ray and Albie were my best two mates. As best mates we went practically everywhere together. On that fateful Saturday they called for me to go with them to help dig Ray's Brother-in-law's allotment over. It was a bike ride away and we only had one old bike that my brother-in-law owned and he had gone out on it.

So Ray and Albie went on without me. As I understand it, a storm blew up, so they made a shelter out of a cape by using their bikes and an iron stake.

This iron stake got struck by lightning killing both Ray and Albie outright and severely burning the brother-in-law who managed to crawl for help.



# *Len Thynne Reminiscence*

## *Len Thynne*

Born in Ravine Grove, Plumstead Common in 1923.

Went to Timbercroft School, Plum Lane and Woolwich Polytechnic.

Len remembers as a child tobogganing with his brothers down the Slade ravine, using the tops of seats outside the Woodman pub. They also used to run down the ravine and up the other side – the undergrowth is too dense to do that now. He has vivid memories of brambles and being stung by wasps.

The top of King's Highway was known as Adder's Hollow, and at the bottom there were allotments; kids would dig up potatoes, light a fire and bake them! Also at the top of King's Highway, at the junction with Swingate Lane, the bit of green there was known as Fletcher's Common. As children they played at the end of Swingate Lane, beyond the shops, where the local Working Men's Club had a sports ground which had a barrage balloon anchored in it throughout the war. Adjacent to the sports ground were strawberry fields and orchards, where the local farmer would come after boys with a shotgun if they were spotted trespassing!

There were apple orchards from the 'Who'd A Thought It' pub right through towards Flaxton Road. The Goldsmith family, who lived in a nearby farmhouse, sold toffee apples. At the top of Garland Road, next to the golf links, where the piggery and abattoir was, children would watch where the golfers lost their golf balls in the undergrowth. The kids would see where they landed and would get through the fence, collect them and sell them back to their owners!

A short cut to Danson Park was from Plumstead Common, along Swingate Lane, which was all country then, past the five-bar swing gate, which is now the Glenmore Arms, and is also the boundary of Plumstead and Welling (therefore London and Kent). Then down past Fanny on the Hill pub, over Wickham Lane through to Martyn's Bank in Welling High Street, and on to Danson Park.

*Danson Park  
swimming pool 1938.*

As a child, Len's understanding of the barrow on Winn's Common was that it was an old



ammunition butt. Opposite the Prince Albert on Old Mill Road was the cricket pitch. Different departments of the Arsenal would play against each other on a Wednesday. Len remembers there would be so many people watching that he couldn't see the matches for the crowds.

Already in his childhood, the Slade Ponds were very slimy in places. Boys would run through the slime at speed to get to the island. A friend of Len's fell in the water and Len remembers getting the blame for it. All the 'gangs' went there – everyone knew everyone else. They also played in the dip behind Blendon Terrace, and at the Territorial's – now a temple – in St Margaret's Grove. They heard the music from the Bandstand and went to the Globe Cinema. The Common was really well used by children then, much more so than today.

My father worked as a carpenter in the Woolwich Arsenal. At that time the only way to get from the 3rd or 4th Arsenal gates to Plumstead Common was to either walk up Griffin or Lakedale Roads. People worked normal hours from Monday – Friday and Saturday morning. My father managed to do this for many years – bringing up Bill, Bob, Win, Jim, Ted and myself. Needless to say, at sixty-four he passed away.

During the early 1930's when I was attending Timbercroft School, we had a boy name Walton whose family were very poor. One day he was late as usual, so the teacher decided to cane his behind. On being told to lift his coat - which was more like an overcoat because it was his father's cast-off jacket - this exposed his bare behind. The teacher thereupon told him to sit down. Some children would come to school without shoes on their feet in those days of the depression. Times were hard, and I remember one day I got home from playing outside and asked my mother for something to eat. She said, "there is nothing to eat; go to bed!"

On leaving school Len was an apprentice engineer at the Arsenal, making guns. The Arsenal also produced ammunition. The chemicals used in the explosives gave the worker's faces a jaundiced appearance. Len ended up working for the MOD (Ministry Of Defence) checking helmets, and visors for the bomb squad's protection.

During the war he learnt first aid at Timbercroft School, which was used as an Auxiliary Fire Service Station and First Aid Post, and became part of the rescue squad. Entrance was through an air lock, which was added to the exterior of the building to prevent light escaping, and so that stretchers could enter if there was a gas attack! Initially, the rescue squad practised in Barnfield Gardens, but they virtually lived at Timbercroft, sleeping in the school. They received seven shillings a week wages. Also remembered were EWS (Emergency Water Supply) tanks on Plumstead Common.

To study at the Woolwich Polytechnic it was necessary for all three lessons for the National Course to be taken on Sundays – three, two hour, sessions. This was because the bombing prevented you attending in the evenings, which was when the enemy attacked, i.e., when it was dark!

On the evening when the landmine dropped on Alabama Street, in April 1941, I was attending a lecture on First Aid at Timbercroft School, given by Dr Remington. Midway through the lecture the windows and blackout blinds crumbled inwards. As I was on call as first aid stretcher party, we left the school and turned up Cardiff Street, which had a number

of demolished houses. That was when calls for help came from a home on the right, going toward Alabama Street. The firemen's duty was to ignore the shouts of people who were trapped and to put out the fire as their first priority. Although the house was gone, the fire in the hearth was still burning away, and the residents were unhurt; we found them under the staircase. They were told to get ready to go to The Rest Centre. Twenty seven people were killed that evening, including my Aunt Nancy. (See: *Ken Costin's Blast From The Past*)

Len also remembers two or three buzz bombs landing near Swingate Lane, and the craters in front of King's Warren School (now Plumstead Manor), caused by bombing.

A keen sportsman, Len was captain of the Arsenal Tennis Team, and on the R.A.S.R.A. committee. For many years he coached badminton at Plumstead Manor School evening classes. He remembers that all the major factories in the area, Siemen's, Stone's, Standard Telephones, Woolwich Arsenal, Johnson & Philip's, Harvey's, Molin's and R.A.C.S. They had football, cricket and tennis teams and provided sports grounds and facilities for their employees. But with the closures of all these firms, this practice came to an end. The consequent neglect and selling of sports grounds resulting in a lack of things for young people to do, is something he deplors today.

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# *Life In The 1920's, 30's, 40's*

*Living At King's Highway*

## *Ivy Runacres*

I have been asked to record a few remembrances of living at King's Highway, as my family have occupied the present house opposite Winn's Common since 1929, which, I believe, makes me one of the 'oldest inhabitants!' However, it has the great advantage of being a very pleasant place to live, if one manages to disregard the northeast wind across the common in winter. Over the years the common has seen many changes since the First World War when I was sent to Timbercroft Junior Mixed School. Our schools were very Empire minded in those days, and we celebrated Empire Day with the children dressed representing every country of the Empire and performing their traditional dances before an English 'King and Queen'; we also had the ancient maypole dances in the school playground. We thought it great fun.

Being wartime, we had to forego our usual prize giving for the sake of war economy and were presented with certificates, I still keep mine as mementoes, but, as I remember, certificates were not much joy to a small child.

*Second Surrey Volunteers on Winn's Common 1865.*

Going to school was sometimes a rather terrifying experience for us as Winn's Common was used as a military training ground for the Royal Artillery from the Woolwich Barracks. About fifty soldiers would come along Plumstead Common Road with their mules, horses, gun carriages and equipment,



all very noisy and churning up clouds of sand and dust, since in those days there was no grass laid down. There were occasions when a horse would bolt across the pavement and decide to go back to its stables on Woolwich Common, so I recall as children we had to keep a very wary eye on their activities.



*Woolwich Arsenal Railway locomotive.*



During the Great War my father was a locomotive driver in the Royal Arsenal, which gave employment to thousands of men and women: The Locomotive Running Section alone had some 250 men employed in transporting arms, shells, guns and gun carriages around the various sections on munitions work. During the school summer holidays I used to take hot meals into the Royal Arsenal for my

father, as there was no canteen for the engine drivers years ago, I was rewarded with a special treat of a ride on the footplate with my father, in front of a roaring firebox, back to the Arsenal Middle Gate.

I still remember the smell of the engine oil and the engine smoke! Incidentally, King George V came to Woolwich Arsenal (see photo) during that war to visit the workers on munitions work, he had a ride on the footplate too, I hope he enjoyed it as much as I did. Life was not easy for the workmen in those days: although most sections had a strong trade union, there were several 'punishable' offences. My father was awarded a week's suspension without pay for running his engine off the rails, although he declared the very hot summer sun had buckled the rail, which caused the derailment. I really think the shock of getting a locomotive off the rails with a full load of war equipment in wagons behind, should have been enough punishment. At the present time his suspension would probably cause an 'all out' strike of sympathetic workmates.



A regular feature of Winn's Common years ago was the all pervading smell from Beasley's Brewery in Lakedale Road, should the wind be blowing in our direction, a sweet smell of hot steamy hops and malt. The huge dray horses used to come to the drinking trough on the corner of King's Highway, where there was also a public drinking fountain and lamp standard. It was fitted with the old galvanised drinking cups affixed by long chains. The base of the fountain still





stands on the common as a memorial.

Also on this corner of Lakedale Road and Winn's Common junction stood the Ascension Church Vicarage with two or three small halls at the rear, (See previous photo) which were originally infants' day schools, and subsequently, became the parish church Sunday Schools.

In my early days it was usual for families to have an allotment situated at the end of Swingate Lane before the Glenmore Estate was built. We always had plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, which, during the war years and stringent rationing was very necessary. (I recall our milk ration was only half a pint for the family, with one a baby of six months). We had three plots of ground around the Ascension Church, which our family used to cultivate for the war effort, mainly growing potatoes.



As children we used to play along an open stream, which ran under the Slade School and came out into the Slade Ravine and then ran into the lake. There was a second open stream which ran across the fields and which was a favourite place for small fish and tadpoles. The other lake on Winn's Common was originally a deep swimming pool where we used to swim, although it was not officially a swimming pool and at times was

very leafy and dirty, being surrounded by trees and thick bushes. During the last war it suffered bomb damage and was later converted into the children's paddling pool and playground.

There was a barrage balloon unit opposite our house in the Ascension Halls. During an air raid one night the balloon was hit by shrapnel and started to deflate and came down in our back gardens. As the cable was being wound in it caught around the chimneystacks of our house and sliced them right through at the base. Unfortunately, the stacks fell right through the roof into the bedrooms; the chaos was compounded when it rained the next day! However, the house remained standing and we were thankful that the damage could be repaired in due course at the Government's expense.

At the end of the last war around a hundred prefabricated houses were situated on Winn's Common for 'bombed out' residents of the area. Each had a small surrounding garden and

small kitchens and bathrooms; they proved to be quite comfortable and, in general, the inhabitants were sad to leave when the area was returned to common land. For years King's Highway had a regular encampment of travelling folk, who lived in the old horse-drawn caravans near the Woolwich Cemetery, mainly because there used to be a small stream nearby. The gypsies made and sold the old-fashioned wooden clothes pegs in the local houses.

To help with the wartime rationing, we all had 'pig' bins at street corners where household scraps were deposited. The piggery was in the grounds of St Nicholas Hospital, although the poor pigs must have been terrified during our nightlong air raids.

St Nicholas Hospital was originally the old Plumstead Workhouse, where very poor people and mainly those having no families and pensions could find shelter and meals. I remember the inhabitants wore a special uniform, which was, in general, very much disliked. No matter how poor, most families in those days would endeavour to keep their elderly folk out of the 'Workhouse'. I remember in Plumstead it was a very welcome change to have the transformation to St Nicholas Hospital, which gave employment and medical attention to so many local families.

*Ivy Runacres, Woolwich and District Antiquarian Society.*

*Centenary Proceedings, Vol. XL1 1995.*

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*Editor's footnote: All the photos were added to story.*



# *Liz Thompson's Fascinating Family History Tree.*

## *Liz Thompson*

Here is a potted history of my Woolwich and Plumstead connections with some of my closest links, ending with my maternal grandmother Elizabeth Kendall/Cook.

**WILLIAM HENRY KENDALL** (b 13/10/1842 at Walworth) was my maternal great grandfather. He was a Sergeant Collar Maker in the Royal Horse Artillery, and subsequently an instructor in saddlery at the Gordon Boy's home, Chobham.

His first marriage was to Sarah Jane Graham. She was born in Woolwich 17/9/1846 (although the family bible states she was born in Canada 24/8/1846) and baptised 25/10/1846; died 25/9/1884, age 38, three survived. Sarah's parents were possibly William Graham, b 1816 in Woolwich, d 1866 in Greenwich (a Gunner and Doctor) and Elizabeth Armstrong. The family presumably moved around during her childhood with the forces.

The 1861 census shows Sarah possibly working as a servant in Portsmouth Town, Hants and in the 1871 census she is living at 49 Chepstow Place, Kensington, as Domestic Servant in household of Annie White, widow, 40.

She married William Kendall 25/12/1871 at Parish Church, Woolwich and in 1881 was living at Shoeburyness Garrison, South Shoebury, Essex with husband and two sons. She died in 1884.

Children of William & Sarah Kendall:



**Will Kendall**, born 1872 to William Kendall and Sarah Graham.

William (Will) Henry Walter Kendall, born 31/12/1872 at Brick Kiln Place, St Leonard, Exeter. Married Maria Louisa (Louie) GAY (b 1873 in Plumstead, a bookkeeper; d 1992 in Woolwich).

1881 census, living in Shoeburyness Garrison, South Shoebury with parents and brother.

1891 census, living at 140 Maxey Road, West India Dock, Plumstead with step-grandmother (Elizabeth Pickering nee Alsop), cousin Arthur Seaward and boarder.

Lived in Eltham after his marriage.

Died 17/2/1946 of a heart attack (chronic vascular disease/cardiac failure) on a train in Eltham

Park, Southern Railway Station, after visiting son Victor. He had worked at the Woolwich Arsenal, along with his brother Albert Herbert (Bert).

Children of William & Maria:



**Ethel Kendall, c1928.**

Ethel Louise, b 20/5/1903 in Plumstead; nurse at Tunbridge Wells Hospital (eventually becoming matron); unmarried, died Sept qtr 1992 in Uckfield.

James (Jim) William, b 19/2/1908 in Eltham; married Elsie; one daughter, Jennifer, he died in middle age. Was a scientist and worked for a time with Sir James Cockroft, inventor of the Hovercraft.

Richard (Dick) Edwin, died c 1911, married; no children – rather a recluse. Was an artist and worked for Lever Brothers in their advertising department (Persil etc).

Gladys Rebecca, b 31/12/1912 in Eltham, died of tubercular meningitis and pulmonary tuberculosis, aged 20, 5/6/1933. Was engaged to the Minister's son and was an adding machine operator for a soap manufacturer.

Victor Henry, married Molly Castleton in Sept qtr 1943 in Woolwich; two daughters, Janet Gay, 1947 and Suzanne Valerie, 1950. Became Life Underwriter for the National Provident Institution and was at one time the President of the Life Underwriters Society in London. Died in a car crash in his 70's.

Edward Francis Kendall b 29/9/1875 at The Barracks, Heavitree, Exeter; d 23/3/1880 from bronchitis at Shoeburyness. Buried at St Andrews, South Shoebury.

Louisa Kendall b 18/12/1877 at the Barracks, Aldershott; d 2/5/1880 from tonsillitis and croup at Shoeburyness. Buried at St Andrews, South Shoebury.

Arthur Vincent Kendall, b 16/2/1879 at Woolwich; d 24/9/1879 from diarrhoea and general debility at Shoeburyness. Buried at St Andrews, South Shoebury.

Albert (Bert) Herbert Kendall, born 1/3/1880 at Shoeburyness, d 7/9/1940; married Edith (Edie) Jane Varnes (b June qtr 1884 at Midhurst, Sussex) Sept 1910 at Guildford, Surrey.

1881 census, living in Shoeburyness Garrison, South Shoebury with parents and brother.

1891 census, living at Gordon Boy's Home, Chobham with parents and three siblings.

1901 census, living as boarder at 14 Pellipar Road, Woolwich.

Later lived at 54 Bramblebury Road, Plumstead.

Worked at Woolwich Arsenal as a store holder. Killed on September 7th 1940 (the real start of the London Blitz), in the Arsenal, aged 60. The shelters were not underground and took a

direct hit from German bombers. Buried at Woolwich Cemetery.

Children of Albert & Edith:

(Albert) Eric, was a Lance Corporal / despatch rider in the Home Guard (57th Kent (Sidcup) Battalion) because his job with the Ministry of Defence did not allow him to join the forces. Killed towards the end of the War (14/5/1944), aged 31, after being hit by an American Army truck. He was on his way home from a weekend manoeuvre when the trailer behind the truck swung sideways and caught Eric's head, throwing him from his motorcycle and fracturing his skull. Buried at East Wycombe (St Michael) Churchyard.

Wife Edie went to live with relations in Guildford and died 26/9/1955 of injuries caused from a bruised hip (pulmonary embolism) after being hit by a cyclist after getting off a bus.

6) Maud Rose Kendall, born 31/7/1881 at Shoeburyness.

WILLIAM Kendall married for the second time to Rebecca Elizabeth Pickering at St Nicholas Church, Plumstead, 24/4/1886. Rebecca was born 21/8/1857 in Plumstead and died 15/11/1911, aged 54.

On her wedding day she wore a red velvet dress with a white plush vest and train, pearl buttons round the neck and gilt buttons down the front.



**Rebecca Pickering on her wedding day, 1886.**

Rebecca wore a red velvet wedding dress.



**William Kendall on his wedding day, 1886.**

Rebecca Pickering's mother was Elizabeth Amelia Alsop, b 1827 in Prescott Baptist, Culmstock, Devon and the family were farmers.. Father was Joseph Alsop, b 1788 and mother was Elizabeth Hill, b 1791. They had 11 children.



**Elizabeth Alsop/Pickering, born 1827, Devon.**

Rebecca's father was James Pickering from Woolwich, a wood sawyer.



**James Pickering**, great, great grandfather, born Woolwich, 1788.  
1841 census, living in Charlton next Woolwich with parents and four siblings.  
1851 census, living at 2 Arthur Street, Plumstead with parents and six siblings.  
1861 census, living at 4 Arthur Street, Plumstead with wife and four children.  
1871 census, living at 140 Maxey Road, Plumstead with wife and six children.  
1881 census, living at 140 Maxey Road, Plumstead with wife and four children.  
His father, Christopher, b 1806 in Woolwich was also a carpenter and was married to Lydia, b 1804. They had seven children.  
1841 census, living in Charlton next Woolwich with wife and five children.  
1851 census, living at 2 Arthur Street, Lewisham with wife and seven children.  
1861 census, living at 2 Arthur Street, Lewisham with wife, three children and four boarders.  
1871 census, living at 98 Plumstead Road, Woolwich, with wife and one daughter.  
Children of James & Elizabeth Pickering:  
Elizabeth (Lydia) b 1855 in Plumstead; servant, lived at Seven Kings nr Ilford and had a son Matthias.



**Lydia Pickering, born 1855, Plumstead.**

1861 census, living in Plumstead with parents and three siblings.  
1871 census, living at 140 Maxey Road, Plumstead with parents and five siblings.  
1881 census, living at 140 Maxey Road, Plumstead with parents and three sisters. Later lived at Seven Kings, Nr Ilford.

Rebecca Elizabeth, b 1857 in Plumstead; dressmaker.



**Rebecca Pickering, born 1857, Plumstead.**

1861 census, living in Plumstead with parents and three siblings.

1871 census, living at 140 Maxey Road, Plumstead with parents and five siblings.

1881 census, living at 140 Maxey Road, Plumstead with parents and three sisters.

1891 census, living at Gordon Boy's Home, Chobham with husband and four children.

1901 census, living at Gordon Boy's Home, Chobham with husband and two children.

James (Jim), b 1860 in Plumstead; married Mary, b 1859 in Welling, Kent.



**Jim Pickering, born 1860, Plumstead.**

1861 census, living in Plumstead with parents and three siblings.

1871 census, living at 140 Maxey Road, Plumstead with parents and five siblings.

1881 census, living in 133, Villas Road, Plumstead with wife.

1891 census, living in Plumstead with wife.

1901 census, living in Plumstead with wife.

George Thomas, b 1861 in Plumstead.

1861 census, living in Plumstead with parents and three siblings.

Possibly died 1861, Lewisham Registration District.

Mary Ann (Polly), b 1862.



**Polly Pickering.**



**Polly & Jenny Pickering**, born Plumstead, 1862 & 1866.

1871 census, living at 140 Maxey Road, Plumstead with parents and five siblings.

1881 census, living at 140 Maxey Road, Plumstead with parents and three sisters.

Marriage registered in Woolwich in 1881, daughter Lena, who married Charlie Hale, a corn merchant in Ilford; they had a son called Charlie, and in later years moved to Twickenham.



**Arthur James (Jim) Seaward**, son of Pam Pickering, born Plumstead, 1885.



**Arthur James Seaward.**

Amelia (Pam), b 1864, married James Seaward and had son, Jim Seaward (b1885 in Plumstead). He married Kate (Kit) who was a nurse.



**Amelia (Pam) Pickering, born Plumstead, 1864.**

1871 census, living at 140 Maxey Road, Plumstead with parents and five siblings.

1881 census, working as domestic servant at 4 Upper Park Villas, Plumstead.

1891 census, working as a nurse/servant at 4 Upper Park Villas, Plumstead to Ebenezer Davis.

1901 census, widow, living at 140 Maxey Road with son, Arthur James (Jim) and two boarders.

Jane (Jenny), b 1866 in Plumstead. Dressmaker.

1851 census, living at 2 Arthur Street, Plumstead with parents and seven siblings.

1871 census, living at 140 Maxey Road, Plumstead with parents and five siblings.

1881 census, living at 140 Maxey Road, Plumstead with parents and three sisters.

? Marriage registered in 1884 in Woolwich.

Children of William & Rebecca Kendall.

Elizabeth Rebecca Kendall (born 10/3/1887 in North Wallington, Fareham, Hampshire; died 31/1/1976); married Ernest Cook (born 21/12/1885; died 21/12/1947) in St Peter & Paul's Church, Teddington, 15/12/1913.

1891 census, living at Gordon Boy's Home, Chobham with parents and three siblings.

1901 census, living as servant to Bowden household at 1 Willenhall Road, Plumstead.

James Pickering Kendall (born 31/7/1889 in Chobham); married Alice Tyldesley a very

talented artist and musician.

He was educated in West End School, Chobham with one teacher, and was the first child to win a scholarship to Farnham Grammar School from that school. He went on to win scholarships to University and also to Heidelberg and to Russia. He travelled extensively as a student. Before the war he went to his first post at Columbia University, New York. On the boat going over he met Alice and they were married. He also had previously booked a passage on the ill-fated "Lusitania", but circumstances prevented him from travelling on that voyage. After the war he became Dean of the Faculty of Science at Edinburgh University and President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the highest distinction he could have received. Alice died in Cyprus, where she had been living for some years due to her poor health (during which time she was commissioned to paint Archbishop Mikarios). His sister Elizabeth (Lyle) lived with him and acted as his hostess during this time. After Alice's death he married Jean who had nursed him during an illness. Died in 1978 in Lasswade, Midlothian.



**Elizabeth Kendall, c1890, daughter of William & Rebecca Kendall.**



**Elizabeth Kendall.**



**Elizabeth and James Kendall c1890**, children to William and Rebecca Kendall.



**Pamela Kendall c1894**, daughter of William and Rebecca Kendall.

Pamela Amelia Kendall - born 13/8/1892 in Chobham; unmarried.

Trained as a nurse at Queen Charlottes Hospital. Died April 18<sup>th</sup> 1924 in St Bartholomew's Hospital.



**Will, Louie and Ethel c1905.**



**Will and Louie Kendall.**



**Bert Kendall c1906.**



**Bert & Edie Kendall c1906.**



**James, Richard & Gladys, 1918.** Children of Will & Louie Kendall.



**Kendall Family c1907.** William & Rebecca Kendall with Will & daughter Ethel, Bert and sister Maud and Elizabeth, James and Pamela.

All family photos supplied by Liz Thompson.

# *London During The Blitz And My Evacuation*

*Alec George Turner.*

I was six and a half years old when the war broke out. I had been a sick child and spent a lot



*Evacuees heading for somewhere safer in the country.*

of time in hospital, so I was at a convalescent home in Epsom when it was obvious there would be a war. The home was emptied and I was taken to London by bus and then transferred to a police boat and taken down the Thames to Woolwich, where a police car met me and took me to my house in Wernbrook Street on Plumstead Common. Only a few days later, as I remember it, our mother Phyllis took my two older brothers, Michael and Victor, and myself to the Plumstead train station from where we were to leave for our evacuation. We each had a tag around our necks with name and address, etc., also a carrier bag with emergency rations. No one seemed to know where

we were going, but it turned out to be West Maling, in Kent. The train journey took all day, as we had to wait hours at different places to let other trains through. Almost all of the other trains were packed with soldiers and we kids were hanging out of the window and shouting, "Don't forget to kill Hitler!" I remember one soldier who took an eraser from his pocket and shouted, "Don't worry, I have an eraser here so I shall rub him out!"

When we arrived at West Maling we were taken to a school playing field, where we sat on the grass and people came to choose and take their evacuee away with them. Nobody wanted three boys so we were the only ones left after several hours in the field. One of the lady helpers took us home to her place and I can only remember falling asleep in her lap.

Next morning they found a temporary home with a very old widow who kept us for two nights. We brothers were then split up and did not live together again until after the war was ended. I was moved first to a home with a middle-aged couple and then to the gardener's lodge on an estate in West Maling. Thereafter I went to a home in Maidstone so that I could be closer to my brother Michael, who is two and a half years older than me. I was later moved to a home for sick children, boys only, outside of Maidstone. For some reason, I don't know why, I was not allowed to go to school, but was kept at the home and could do more or less whatever I wished during the daytime, while all of the other boys were at school. I did not in any way feel ill! However, I did lose a lot of schooling during that period, and

there was no attempt to help or encourage me to do any studies.

I returned to Bexleyheath, as our house in Wernbrook Street had been bombed. My mother, Michael and I slept on the floor in a Morrison shelter. Later our house was rebuilt in Wernbrook Street and we returned and slept in an Anderson shelter in the garden. This continued until the 'doodlebugs' started falling on London and I was again evacuated, this time to Bolton, where I spent two years and never once heard an air raid siren. Part of this time was spent on a goat farm with a family called Holdsworth and then later with two other families. In Bolton I started with my education again, at Castle Hill School.

Contact with my mother was never the same again after the war. My eldest brother Victor did not come home but went to a naval school in Rosyth, Fyfe. I hated the war and everything it brought with it. I have very few good memories, except for a Mr Threlfall, in Bolton, who took me under his wing and helped me with more or less everything.

*Editor's footnote: Photo was added to story.*

*WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at [bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](http://bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar)'*



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# *London's Oldest Pensioner, A Plumstead Centenarian.*

*Mariyn Milligan*

This is my great, great grandfather George Crago. He was a hundred and six when he qualified as London's oldest pensioner. In fact he died on the day that he was notified he had been granted an old age pension, on the 8th January 1909.

Up to the time of his death he never had a serious illness, He walked twice a day around Plumstead Common. He worked until he was over 90.

George was born in Liskeard in Cornwall. He was in the 1881 census for Plumstead but I have not been able to find him on earlier census records, as yet. I believe this information was also in the London Evening News, January 1909.

I know His son Matthew was living at 46 Vicarage Road, Plumstead, in 1907, as my grandmother was married from that same address.

The population of Plumstead in 1841 was 2,816; by 1851 it had risen to 8,373.

Vicarage Road was in the first stage of development, on the lower slopes of Plumstead, which dated from the mid 1840's to the 1860's.



*George Crago.*

# Lord Haw Haw's Dad

Allan Robinson

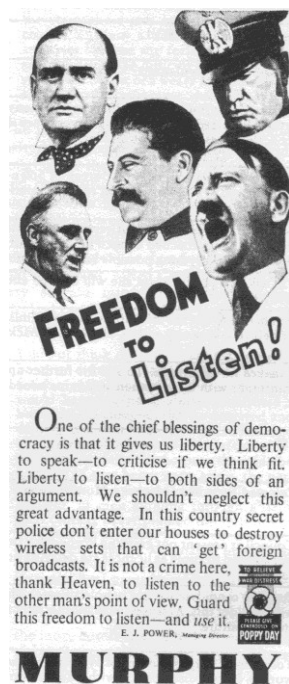
Extract taken from his the story: Woolwich In The War.

Every night a broadcast from Germany was beamed our way, and someone who called himself "Lord Haw-Haw" used to feed us with outrageous propaganda. Lord Haw-Haw's father lived in a big house in Shrewsbury Lane, close to the top of Eglington Hill. He was a very short man who always wore a flat cap, brown overcoat and shiny leather leggings. Why he was not interned I do not know. Lord Haw-Haw's real name was William Joyce and I think his father's name was Harry Joyce.

One night he apparently said that the German paratroops were going to take over London. It had previously been decided that if paratroops landed all the church bells would ring. If gas was used the police and air raid wardens would sound football rattles.

The rumour of paratroops landing spread like wildfire and as my father was away some nights; I decided to do something about it. I had a Colt 45 revolver and one bullet that fitted it. On nights that dad was away, mum, Rex and I all slept in the same room. Without my mother knowing, I used to put the loaded revolver under the bed on my side. My stupid plan was that if a German soldier burst into our room, I was going to shoot him, take his gun and defend us from the top of the stairs. Luckily, the occasion never arose.

After the war, the revolver mentioned, along with another smaller one, was buried in the back garden of our house because of a government amnesty. When the house was sold, I tried to dig them up, but I could not locate them. I expect they are still there today.



# *Lorna Chudasama (nee Riches) Remembers*

*Lorna Chudasama*

1996 to 1934: Rippolson Road, Army Flats at Artillery Road and Red Barracks in Francis Street.



My family's story starts around 1896 when my great grandfather Robert Anderson Ingram (a Scotsman) left the Westminster Police. He had served some twelve years as a police constable and resigned to take up a job in Woolwich as a Tram Driver. A studio photograph was taken (left) at this time showing my great grandparents Robert and Sarah with their daughter Margaret (my grandmother) and son, also named Robert in c1896. My grandmother was about fourteen years old and her brother some six years younger.

In 1903 Sarah died at the age of 48. My grandmother at this time had been apprenticed to a tailor. The family were living at 20 Rippolson Road, Plumstead. My great grandfather thought it would be best to send his grieving daughter to stay with her mother's relatives in Grayshott. A short time later my great grandfather remarried. There were no children by the second marriage, although the couple adopted a nephew (related to the wife).

My grandmother stayed with her older half sister who was employed as a housekeeper to a wealthy Doctor and his family. The same family employed my grandmother as they valued her sewing skills. A few years later (1908) she married Alfred White. There were four



1915. My grandmother, with her four eldest children. Robert is on her right, Dennis is standing on a bench

children by this marriage. There is an old photograph taken in 1915 showing her with the children. Alfred was killed in action the same year. His name appears on a monument at Grayshott. Following the news of her husband's death, my grandmother returned to Plumstead. She stayed with her father and stepmother briefly, then rented rooms nearby.

My grandmother remembered this five year period in her life as dreadful and hard. To support her young family she took in sewing, doing repairs and alterations at home. She worked all night while the children slept. I am not sure how she met my grandfather (a career soldier) but most of the sewing work undertaken was for the nearby army personnel. On marrying my grandfather, Thomas Wilson, the family moved to Army Flats (13C Block Artillery Place, Woolwich). My grandfather was an ex miner from Wales, he was also a boxer and for a short while continued boxing for the Army. There are several photographs taken early in my grandfather's army career, and two taken at different times in the Gym at Woolwich, presumably following a team display c1918/19. When my grandparents married (1920), my grandfather was an Army



My grandmother, Margaret Anderson Ingram, taken in a Woolwich Studio when she was about 18.

I believe her mother died soon after this photograph was taken.

A third cousin who lives in Scotland, Alistair Ian Ingram, provided this photograph.



Thomas Wilson initially made his name as a fairground boxer, then for a period boxed for the Army.



Instructor at the Military College of Science, which was housed in the Red Barracks, Francis Street, Woolwich.

*I do not know the story behind this photo or where it was taken other than it was in the early stages of the First World War and both brothers were on sick leave. Walter is wearing a tie (it would have been red) that would indicate he was a hospital patient and both have sticks. There was a severe epidemic of flu sweeping Europe at that time.*

*My mother's cousin, Anthony Brown, a nephew of Thomas and Walter Wilson, sent this photograph to me. Anthony devoted much time tracing the footsteps of Walter Wilson who tragically was unable to keep up with his patrol in the desert when his camel became lame. It was concluded he had been killed by the enemy. His name appears on a monument in Jerusalem.*

These barracks were unusual in that the rooms opened out on to a veranda that spanned all sides of the building. It was thought there had been a mix up of plans, and that the barracks had originally been planned for abroad, most probably India. *Thomas Wilson c1918 Army Gym Team.*



My mother, Leonora Wilson, and her two sisters were born in Woolwich and baptized at The Royal Garrison Church of St George. All the children, now numbering seven in the family, initially attended the nearby Garrison Infants School and went to Sunday School. My mother and her sister Winnie were in the same class at the Garrison School (see photograph taken c1926) in New Road close to St Peters Church. These barracks were unusual in that the rooms opened out on to

The three bedroomed army flat must have been very cramped. The four girls shared two double beds (mother was asthmatic and remembers being afraid of her big intolerant sister Margaret who was unkind). The boys shared a double bed in the second bedroom. She remembers her mother being very strict and the children were made to keep as quiet as mice. From an early age they shared the housework. The girls were taught to sew and knit. They knitted their own vests and socks with their mother doing the difficult bits like the heels and necks. Their mother made their dresses, skirts and coats. The cooking was done on a range that was in one room serving as a kitchen, dining room and lounge. There was a toilet but no bathroom in the early years. A large tin bath hung on the wall. This would be taken down and filled with hot water from the copper. Later, the flats had a bathroom added. This was very cleverly done by enclosing the veranda/balcony to each flat and converting it into a bathroom.

My mother's eldest brother, Robert Alfred White, is about 14 or 15 years old and in uniform. He was a cadet at the nearby Royal Artillery Barracks. There is another photograph taken a couple of years later, known in the family as "the three angels". My grandmother made the

girls dresses. The last photograph in this series is of my grandfather and his three daughters, all in similar hats. Again my grandmother made their coats.

*Below photo: 1919. Army Gym Team. Thomas Wilson is on the far right of the front row.*



*Robert White; he lost his father in 1915 but despite the several set backs in his younger life, he achieved much and was a high ranking army officer when he died.*



*Three Angels' c 1927. My mother, Leonora Wilson, is on the left, Winnie in the middle and Nancy on the right*

My mother and her sisters were taken to visit their grandfather and his wife now living at 51 Rippolson Road. My mother's father enjoyed visiting his father-in-law as both were partial to a good bottle of whisky that was meant to be shared. In 1932 my great grandfather's health deteriorated and he died in St Nicholas Hospital.



*My grandmother c 1924 with all seven of her children. My mother, Leonora Wilson, is the middle child at the front*



*My great grandfather, Robert Anderson Ingram (circa 1930) standing in the back garden of 51 Rippolson Road.*



1926/7 Thomas Wilson with daughters  
Leonora, Nancy and Winnie

*My grandfather, Thomas Wilson, and his three daughters.*

Around 1934, my grandfather retired from militia left the Army Flats and moved to rented accommodation. My grandfather did, however, continue to work at the Military College of Science and in his civilian role, he began to organize club activities that helped keep the young ruffians off the streets and also teaching them to box.

#### **1934 to 1944: Woolwich - 144 Eglinton Road and Military College of Science**

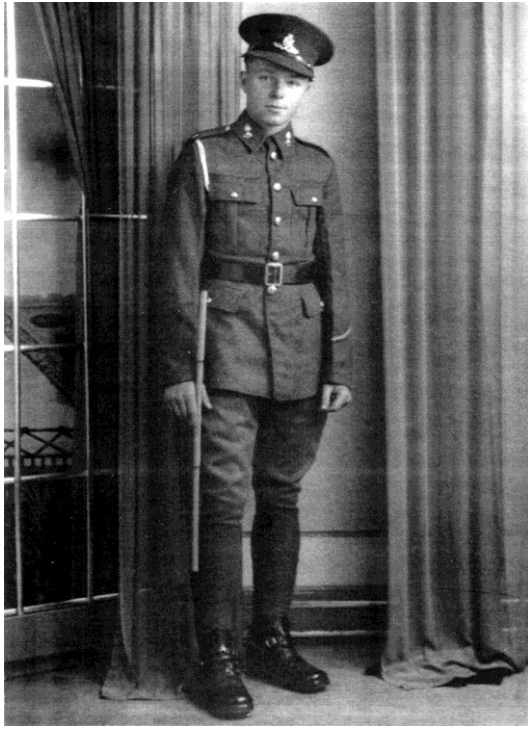
On leaving the Army Flats, the family moved to rented accommodation at 144 Eglinton Road. The army had helped locate the terraced property, which was large and spacious with a garden at the back. Access to the front door was via steps with railings on either side. Inside the house for the first few hours the younger girls raced up and down the stairs, a novelty. Later that year Winnie Wilson started work at a sports factory called Gradiges (my mother doesn't know how it's spelt) and the following year in 1935 my mother joined her there. She was aged 14 and it was her first job. (At the outbreak of war the factory closed.) The factory was a subsidiary of Slazenger's.



*12th May 1937 was King George VI and Queen Elizabeth's Coronation. It was also the day my mother met my father, Jack Riches. He was on leave for the occasion, with a bunch of friends. They were all dressed in "civvies". My mother, also with a group of girls, wouldn't have spoken to him otherwise, as she, the daughter of a soldier, was not allowed to speak to soldiers. The group bumped into each other outside the Rushgrove Gym and introductions were made. My father was at the Military College of Science and mustered at the end of that year in December. My mother Leonora Wilson aged 14, second lady on the right, middle row. The lady on my mothers left is Florrie Sullivan. The man kneeling on one leg, front row on the left, is the Manager, Jack Walker; the lady beside him is Marjorie Coombes. Next to her is Joan (who married Neil Flynn). The photograph was taken in 1935 outside the Sports Factory. The Barracks are in the background.*



*1939. Front row from L – R; Nancy, Leonora and Winnie. Back row, Walter Blake and my father, Jack Riches.*



*My father, Jack Raymond Riches, 1937.  
Outside the Military College of Science.*



*My Dad, Jack Riches c.1938.*

During this year the family were pleased to receive a visit from Walter Blake who was a nephew of Thomas Wilson. Walter had no brothers and sisters and made the long journey from Wales several times to see his uncle.

In 1938 my mother's eldest sister, Margaret, married a colleague she worked with at Marks & Spencer. His name was Stan Powley. There are several photographs taken in the back garden of No. 144 Eglinton Road, which was one of many

*Taken in the back garden at Eglinton Road.*



Taken at Eglinton Road following Margaret White's marriage to Stan Powley c1939.

*Margaret's Wedding Day. Front Row, L -R; the girls are Nancy, Leonora and Winnie. The men are brothers of the groom. Middle Row, my grandfather and grandmother, my aunty Margaret (the bride) and Stan Powley (the groom) Stan's mother and sister. Back Row, my uncles Alan and Bob. The other gentleman is Stan's brother-in-law.*

properties owned by the Burrage or Burbidge family. This family who used the house next door as a maintenance office owned the entire terrace. My grandmother who was quite religious discovered an aunt of the family had been her Sunday School teacher and, following this conversation, the landlords very generously reduced the rent and gave part of the next door garden to my mother's brother Dennis to cultivate. Dennis was a very keen gardener who grew vegetables as well as prize roses and carnations.



*This is me in the back garden of 144 Eglington Road, 1941.*



*This is my mother's sister Winnie with Trixie.*

War was declared in September 1939 and the following January 1940 my parents were married in Gosport prior to my father rejoining his unit with the British Expeditionary Force in France. My mother returned to work at the Arsenal. In May that year my father was successfully evacuated from Dunkirk following an initial failed attempt (the first craft sank and he had to swim back to shore).

Thomas Wilson had been looking forward to being a grandfather as my mother was now expecting me. Sadly he died unexpectedly in May 1941 of a heart attack. Owing to fears for the safety at the time of my mother's confinement at the Nursing Home for Mothers and Babies in Samuel Street, Woolwich, temporarily relocated to Lord Podmore's House in Paddock Wood, Tunbridge Wells, Kent where I was born in October 1941.

During this year, my mother's second eldest brother, Dennis White married Edith and moved into a home of his own. Her eldest brother Robert was already married and living in Army Married Quarters. Her brother Alan was still living at home. Alan had tried to enlist but was refused as he was on the reserve list for Seimens where he worked. Nancy was working for the War Office at the Arsenal.



1941 at 144 Eglington Road, Woolwich. Margaret Anderson Wilson with daughter-in-law Edith and family dog Trixie. Edith married Dennis White.



Circa 1938. From left to right, Alan White, Margaret White, Leonora, Nancy and Winnie Wilson.

In November 1941 I was baptized at the same St Georges Garrison Church as my mother and her sisters. This Church suffered a direct hit in 1944 and all that remains to this day is a shell (see photograph). The Church is still consecrated and occasional open air services are conducted there.



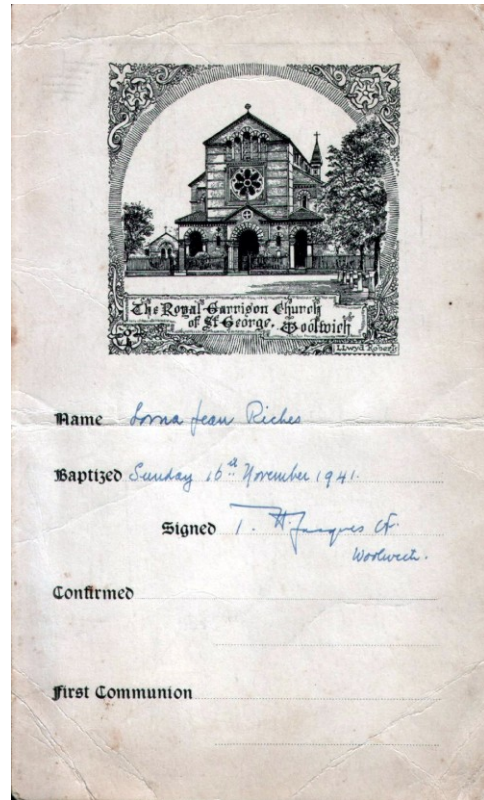
Nancy Olive Wilson who worked in the office at the Arsenal. Several times this entailed Nancy travelling to Wales on assignments.



My grandmother, Margaret Anderson Wilson in the garden of 144 Eglington Road, with her second eldest son, Dennis Ingram White. Trixie actually belonged to Dennis.



My mother and my aunts were baptised at this Church. I was also baptised here on 16 November 1941. The Church suffered a direct hit in 1944 and the above photo shows how it stands today. (2007)



This is my Baptism Certificate from The Royal Garrison Church.



1942. This is me (Lorna) sitting on the front steps with cousin Judith. The railings next to Judith were later taken down, as the materials were needed to assist in the war effort.



Circa 1943. Judith taking me for a walk with our proud grandmother looking on.

In June the following year he left Stokes Bay for the beaches of Normandy, as did thousands of brave soldiers, including my uncle Stan Powley.

Much later we learned Stan had been killed in action.

In July 1944 my mother's sister Winnie married Victor Hinds at a Church in Herbert Road. The marriage had been brought forward as Vic had come home on leave. His ship had been damaged in Bombay and had limped home earlier than expected. Despite luxury items being hard to get, the neighbours had rallied round to make the wedding a very special occasion. Between them they provided a splendid feast. There were a lot of sailors at the wedding who made a great fuss of me. Apparently I was very merry, joining in the singing. This rather worried my mother who was heavily pregnant. I do not remember any of this but what happened a few months later is a vivid memory.



1943. This my father, Jack Riches, with me (Lorna) and my mother (Leonora). My father was at this time in the R.E.M.E attached to the 51 Highland Division.



July 1944. My mother's sister Winnie has married Vic Hinds at a Church in Herbert Road. On Winnie's right is my mother's brother Alan White and next to him is my mother's sister Nancy.

fallen across his cot but fortunately not on him. I was barely three and remember being carried outside by a fireman. I kept asking what has happened to my nana's house. The gas main was alight and there was a lot of activity. The fireman holding me was handed a tin mug of tea from which I took several sips before being placed in an ambulance with my mother and brother. The ambulance was driven by a woman who took us to a hospital. My

A doodlebug destroyed our home at 144 Eglington Road late one night in October 1944. I woke up to a loud rumbling and crashing sound. I was coughing and struggling to get my breath. There was thick dust and debris. My brother was only a few weeks old; something had



*Brother Jack 5, me 8 and cousin  
Judith 9, in 1949.*

ears were syringed and my brother's eyes were bathed. His eyelids were swollen. We were relatively unscathed and discharged a few hours later. We were taken to a Rest Centre where we spent a couple of nights. The Rest Centre was at Slade School. Here the Salvation Army gave us soup and distributed items from parcels sent from America. We were given scented soap and talcum powder as well as clothing and bedding. The clothing was new and my baby brother had a beautiful blue knitted suit. My grandmother joined us at the Rest Centre and was given several beautiful sewn quilts which had tickets on them indicating they were gifts from the Ladies Guild of Ohio. My grandmother had not been at home when it was hit, she had gone as usual to the shelter where she slept each night. I had been repeatedly asking what happened to my nana's house but no one told me until at last my grandmother said it had been knocked

down by the apples and pears. Strangely enough, that explanation satisfied me for a few years.

Our home had been looted, so only a few items were salvaged. What remained was badly damaged. We were very fortunate to have survived unhurt; a neighbour in the terrace lost two members of her family.

Early in the war, Walter Blake had been seriously wounded and spent years in hospital. Upon recovery towards the end of the war, he returned to Woolwich planning to visit his cousins. He was shocked to find the site had been cleared where the house had stood. He did not know where the family had gone and decades were to pass before contact was re-established.

#### **1945-1956: 74 Shrewsbury Lane, Plumstead and Nightingale Place Woolwich**

After we had lost the roof over our heads, we (my mother, brother and myself) stayed temporarily with my grandmother Riches at Gosport. My grandmother Wilson and my mother's sisters Winnie and Nancy moved to a large semi detached house in Plumstead. This was 74 Shrewsbury Lane, Shooters Hill. They were soon joined by my mother's eldest sister, Margaret Powley, (now a widow) and my cousin Judith. Aunt Margaret took charge of the household and organized the living arrangements.



*Slow ship to China, on the Britannic to  
Singapore.*

We did not join them, as in 1945 we moved into Married Quarters at Gosport. The following year we boarded the Britannic (a luxury cruise ship used as a troop carrier) and sailed to join my father in Singapore. Whilst we were in Singapore, my mother's youngest sister got married and left with her husband for South Africa. Many years were to pass before we saw

Nancy again.

In 1948 we left Singapore and sailed on the \*Empire Windrush (this was a troopship which a few months earlier that year had brought immigrants to Britain). I have fond memories of this ship as I celebrated my seventh birthday (5 October) on board. The Captain invited me and some chosen friends to have a tea party in his cabin and a tour of the bridge. We arrived back in England in time to spend Christmas with my grandmother in Plumstead. It was the first real Christmas I can remember. Judith and I received identical dolls that had two front teeth and closed their eyes. Judith very kindly knocked the teeth out of my doll so we didn't get them muddled up. She need not have troubled as our Aunt Winnie had knitted dresses,



*Circa 1948. This is my cousin Judith Powley in the garden of No.74 Shrewsbury Lane.*

*Judith's father, Stan Powley was killed in action in 1944.*



*Circa 1946: 74 Shrewsbury Lane. This is my cousin Elizabeth Hind, daughter of Winnie & Vic.*

hats and booties for the dolls. Mine was dressed in green with a crimson trim. This went some way to pacify me for the loss of my old toys that I had tried to reclaim. The few that had been retrieved from Eglington Road had been given to my little cousin Elizabeth (daughter of Aunty Winnie and Uncle Vic), including a big Airedale dog on wheels that could be sat on or pushed along.



*Winnie and Vic's wedding July 1944 at a church in Herbert Road.*

*On Winnie's right is my mother's brother Allan White and my mother's sister Nancy.*



*This is my lovely grandmother in the garden of 74 Shrewsbury Lane. As my father was a career soldier, we frequently moved around the country and abroad joining my father wherever he was posted. I loved visiting my grandmother; her home was familiar and welcoming. She remained at this address for the rest of her life. She died in 1956.*

*The kitchen was shared, as was the*

I thought my grandmother's home in Shrewsbury Lane was the best ever. I liked the gardens with its fruit trees and pretty flowers, the busy road with the horse and carts trundling by. There was the milkman and the rag and bone man calling out. Any steaming horse manure deposited in the road was soon collected by residents for their gardens. We had woods, parks and commons nearby. Up the lane a couple of doors from our house was a tennis club. This was quite noisy in the afternoons. Further down the Lane there was a horse trough and another opposite the fire station. The fire station fascinated me; I would stare at the red doors willing a fire engine to come out. We passed this often as we turned to go down the steep hill to the shops. Although it was a long walk and my grandmother had troublesome ankles, we never caught the bus.

I remember thinking my aunty Margaret was rich. She had a telephone and a lovely carpet in the front room. There were nice ornaments and a television in a cabinet. We were rarely allowed in this room or her dining room, which was next to my grandmother's sitting room. My aunty Winnie and uncle Vic had their own large sitting room which was also used as a dining room, they always made us welcome. The bathroom upstairs. The hot water in the kitchen and in the

bathroom was heated by noisy Ascots that frightened me. There was an outside toilet and an upstairs toilet. My grandmother made lovely rice puddings, which we had often. She also made bread and butter puddings. I liked anything my grandmother made, particularly the apple pies. My aunty Margaret occasionally made a fruit cake and I was always surprised at her skill in cutting the slices so thin. We were allowed one slice each. We stayed with my



*These two photographs were taken circa 1950 of my cousins, Judith Powley and Elizabeth Hind at Eaglesfield Park, Plumstead. We accessed Eaglesfield Park via Foxcroft Road that led into Shrewsbury Lane two doors away. On the junction (corner) of Shrewsbury Lane and Foxcroft Road there was a tennis club. Further up Foxcroft Road there was a bowling club that we passed on our way to the park. We would cross Eaglesfield Road and walk into the park. From the park, which was the highest point for miles around, there were magnificent views. The other end of Eaglesfield Road led into Shrewsbury Lane (much further down the lane from where we lived) and on the corner of this junction stood the Fire Station. We passed the Fire Station each day on our way to Plum Lane School.*

grandmother for a few months. I went to Plum Lane School. The school was at the bottom of a steep hill. Half way down the hill there was a wooden tuck shop. We stopped there to buy sherbet and liquorice. My cousin Bobby (the son of my uncle Dennis White) went to the same school.

He was a few months younger than me but in the same class. Bobby lived in a prefab. Each morning we were made to have a large spoon of Malt, I

didn't mind that. We were also made to drink a small bottle of milk which I hated as it was warm (being placed close to the radiators). I thought it smelt and my protests got me into trouble. In Singapore we had chocolate flavoured milk at school that was much nicer.

My cousin Judith went to a different school altogether. She caught a bus to a private convent school, her place funded by the Army. She wore a smart grey uniform with a large grey hat. I liked staying with my grandmother and was very upset when we moved away to Tidworth.

Here I went to the Garrison School for a few months, then we moved to another area in Tidworth. I then went to a small village school close to the Ordnance Depot where we lived. Our house was the only one inside the large Depot complex. My father ran the REME

Workshop there. We had a very large garden and we kept chickens and rabbits. These were

of course intended to supplement our meat ration and provide us with eggs but I didn't realize that. Each evening my father with myself and my brother in tow would take a hessian sack to gather dandelions and clover for the rabbits. The Depot was behind tall double gates, which were opened by a guard. In the morning when it was clocking on time, a siren went. The siren went again at the end of the day when it was time for the workers to clock off. The siren always unnerved me. My cousin Judith spent each school holiday with us.

I stayed a few weeks with my grandmother during 1951 when my aunty Margaret took Judith and myself to visit the Festival of Britain. I was very impressed.

Our next posting was to Colchester. My brother and I started at the Garrison School at Berechurch and found ourselves very disliked by a group of children. I never understood why we were subjected to such hostility and still don't. We arrived home at the end of the day with torn clothing and bruises. After a few weeks of this, we were both transferred to other schools in the area. Some eighteen months later, my father went to Korea. My grandmother stayed with us for a while as my mother had become unwell. The army children in Colchester whose fathers were in Korea were invited just before Christmas to take part in a special radio show. We recorded messages to our fathers and were entertained by Max Bygraves, Beryl Reid, Peter Brough and Archie Andrews (this latter character was a dummy from the radio series "Educating Archie"). Boards were held up telling us when to laugh and clap.

We watched the Coronation on a friend's television and at school we were presented with a book called "Royalty in Essex". I still have mine.

Late in 1953 we left England on the TSS Empire Halladale, we were to join my father who was now stationed in Hong Kong. We celebrated Christmas Day on board, the crew put on a splendid party. Late the previous night (Christmas Eve) we had been allowed on shore at Colombo to shop for summer clothes and sandals. Because the ship was in port many shops, lit by oil lamps, had opened specially. We had a military police escort who made sure no one strayed and got lost.

We spent a year in Hong Kong in the New Territories (Sek Kong Valley). I went first to the small army school in the village and after passing the Murray House Test (13 plus). I travelled by army truck to a train station the other side of the valley, then caught a train to Kowloon. I was anxious to return home to England particularly as the 20th Field R.A. (to which my father was attached) was due to be posted back to Woolwich. Late in 1954 we boarded the SS Empire Fowey and another Christmas was spent on the high seas.

In January 1955 we arrived back in Woolwich, staying initially with my grandmother at Shrewsbury Lane and then moving to army quarters at Nightingale Place. My aunty Winnie and uncle Vic had at this time moved to Eltham with their children. I started at Waverley School for Girls and my brother went to Bloomfield School. I lived close enough to walk to my grandmothers and did most weekends. I would have tea in the garden or in her sitting room. She would be knitting and listening to the radio. She never missed Dick Barton, Special Agent. Another favourite of hers was Mrs Dales Diary.

The following year we were moved to Colchester again and I started my eleventh school (there was one more school after this, then College in Kenya). My grandmother became ill

and we returned to Woolwich to visit her in hospital. She died in 1956.

The house at Shrewsbury Lane was now too large for my aunty Margaret and cousin Judith. They moved to a new maisonette. We visited them in their new home. Sadly, within months of moving, aunty Margaret was hurt in a car accident and died a few days later. Judith was following a nursing career at the time. My father and my uncle Bob (Robert White) both offered Judith a home but with the support of her matron, she declined.

After a few years in Colchester, we joined my father in Kenya. I only came back to Woolwich once in 1972 for the wedding of aunty Winnie and uncle Vic's second daughter. All the White/Wilson offspring were there apart from my uncle Bob who had died of natural causes whilst still a serving army officer. His widow and daughters emigrated soon after to South Africa. My aunty Nancy was at the wedding with her husband and daughter Marilyn, they had returned from South Africa and were living in Hampshire. I was at the wedding with my parents and brother. Also with me was my eldest daughter.

I had always regarded my grandmother's home as my own. It was a familiar welcoming place. It was my anchor. Although it suited some, moving around as often as we did unsettled me and I never felt anywhere else was home.

\*The Empire Windrush sank years later in March 1954. We were in Hong Kong at this time and knew several of the army families who had embarked from the Colony. There were also wounded on board from Korea. All the passengers survived having been picked up by the French Navy.



*My parents, Leonora and Jack Riches circa 1968. They were attending a wedding. The parents of the bride were old army school friends of both my mother and father.*



*Myself and cousin Judith (granddaughters of Margaret Anderson Wilson) spending a day at Margate circa 1954. This was soon after returning from Hong Kong. I was attending Waverley School and Judith was at Kidderbrook.*



*•Circa 1971. A family wedding group outside Woolwich Town Hall. The bride is my cousin Debbie Hind, youngest daughter of Winnie & Vic. My cousin Judith Wilkinson (nee Powley) is the lady at the back in the large hat. On her left is my cousin Elizabeth Henry (nee Hind). My brother, Jack is at the front on the far left and you can just see part of my dad, Jack, behind him. My mother, Leonora Riches, is on his right behind my daughter Jayshree, the child with the white socks.*

### **Miscellaneous “Snippets” following lunch with mother.**

**(January 2007)**

Today we were looking at lovely bed quilts in the Gift Shop at our local Garden Centre where we have lunch every Wednesday. I remembered and remarked on the lovely patchwork quilts that covered the beds at my grandmother’s home at 74 Shrewsbury Lane. Mother said the Salvation Army at the Rest Centre gave all the quilts to us after my grandmother’s home at 144 Eglinton Road had been destroyed in 1944. Mother said she always had wanted to thank the Ladies Guild of Ohio, their thoughtful generous gifts meant such a lot to distressed families. I thought it might still be possible to do so.

Mother and her sisters were born at the Military Hospital for Mothers & Babies in Depot Road. She thinks this might have been part of the Herbert Hospital. They lived in Army Flats (C13) in Artillery Place. They had a three bedroom flat, which must have been crowded for a family of nine.

My mother recently heard from a friend who had returned to Woolwich a few years ago to do a trip down “Memory Lane” to take photographs. This friend said the Army Flats at

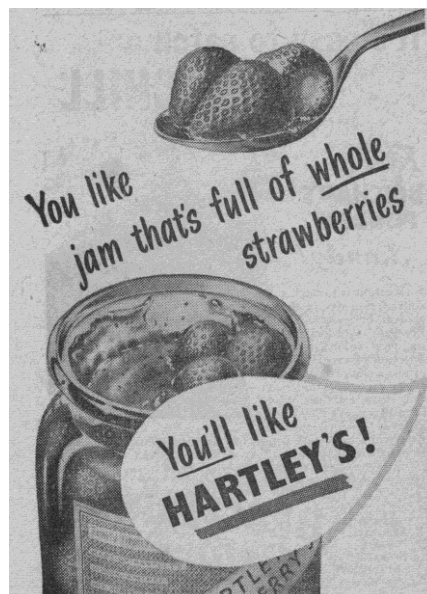
Artillery Place had now been demolished.

My mother doesn't remember any other names; apart from the lady next to her (second row on my mother's left) was Florrie Sullivan. My mother thinks the buildings in the background are the barracks. The group are facing their workplace so unfortunately there is no view of the factory, which closed on the outbreak of war.



*My grandmother being mischievous.*

*The trousers on the line belong to her son (my uncle) Dennis White and she is checking his pockets. The photo was taken in the back garden of 144 Eglington Road.*



# Mark Remembers

*Mark Weightman*

I can remember the barrage balloons on Winn's Common by the old Accession Hall. These large silver-grey objects were up in the sky during the Blitz and used in conjunction with the anti-aircraft guns. These were quite close to the Ravine café.

I remember the ice cream sold there at the café, made by an Italian. I was an apprentice gent's hairdresser at the Co-op. Later, when qualified, and after national service, working in the Plumstead Common area, I was cutting his hair one day when he told me how he had cut his finger and how the plaster fell off his cut finger and dropped into the mix! Why he should elaborate with me about this I don't know, as it wasn't in his interest. He came a few times to get his hair cut before I moved on to somewhere else.

I remember a neighbour, Mr Beacham, a real character. We had a mutual interest for a while, even though he was a lot older than me, as I was only a young teenager and was friends with some of his older children. I had a James Captain 199cc motorcycle. He had a 98cc Excelsior. We both had problems with these bikes misfiring. Years later I realised the fault with my machine. It needed a coil. I shudder to think but at that time I could never have afforded the 35/- for a new one! However, during one afternoons work on his machine, he took it twice round the block, Sladedale, Goldsmid, Lakedale Roads and down again to No.103 Sladedale Road. Quite pleased with himself he said, "I may even get it taxed and insured!"



*Mark and his vintage Rudge motorbike.*

Rumbold's corner shop was down the hill from us in Sladedale Road. Next to them were lock up garages, tucked away in the corner, owned by a Mr Russell, a Russian who spoke only in broken English. He had been an engineer on rotary aero engines during the First World War. He was very kind to me and helped me with his mechanical knowledge when I was tinkering with my old Rudge 250 cc motorbike that I kept at his lock-up. One day, when he found me tinkering with this old bike whilst I was reading the Rudge manual, he said to me, "That's no good, you need the Bible!" I restored two types of Rudges, a Rudge Rapid 250cc and two Rudge Ulsters, the later with the help of the Rudge Enthusiast Club. Hugh 'Ugh' Porter was the Rudge Club chairman, a wonderful character. He lived up in Vernbrook?



*Mark, aged 16, Winn's Common with the old St Nicholas Hospital behind him, c.1954.*

old Globe cinema. Ugh worked nights as a : the 'Motorcycling Magazine' and rode his with sidecar, to and fro from Plumstead to for many years. I used to spend many long rter's house chatting about motor bikes with a nn, who lived in Goldsmid Street, whose dad of the I.R.A. and used to be seen walking n cycle clips on.

oy Penwarden, had an A.J.S. 350 cc motorbike ularly be seen polishing it out in the road in ouse, at No 81. He would use his mum's oolish. Another neighbour, Johnny Milson's spent more on polish than on petrol.

with a girl named Florence (Florri) Picton. I'm that I once fired an orange pip at her from my her on the cheek, injuring her, as she was day School. I fired it from a considerable was an unfortunate fluke that it actually hit ve caused her serious injury. Her dad was onfronted our dad, who later smashed my es. I would like to apologise to her now, all

these years later. I'm so very sorry Florri.

I had a great collection of birds' eggs, as this was a hobby that I really enjoyed. I had an older mate, Dave Waller. We would go over into the hospital grounds, or explore Bowman's Wood, Bostall Woods and Abbey Wood marshes for birds' eggs. When a nest was spotted I'd climb up to it and carefully take an egg. I'd put the egg in my mouth as I climbed back down. I would then prick the ends of the egg with a thorn or a pin and then 'blow' the egg. This was done by blowing into the small hole in the top of the egg and as you blew in one end the yolk and contents were forced out the bottom end, leaving an empty eggshell that would not go bad. This specimen was then added to the other eggs in our collections. We both had quite large collections, which were carefully kept in boxes lined with cotton wool. My collection grew quite big over the years and I was very proud of it.

We played on the Common for hours. There was a particular Park Keeper we kept alert to. We nicknamed him 'Gritty Whiskers' and we avoided him by running off when ever he was spotted. I was very young at the time and it was a big adventure out in that great outdoors.

I recall Mackintosh's Minerals, the best mineral waters in London, especially their Ginger Beer and their Cream Soda! It was made at their local firm, situated at the back of and next to the Alma pub, off the lower end of King's Highway. I also remember Moak's ice cream, I recall it being sold mainly over in the Slade area. It was an ice cream that had lumps in. The Co-op later bought this firm. The owners, the Mackintoshes, would occasionally visit our next-door neighbour, Sally Ridge, and her son George.

George worked as a blacksmith at Crossness, opposite the Ford Motor Company on the River Thames. He cycled all his working life to Crossness from 69 Sladedale Road. George, when young, was a very good footballer. Charlton Athletic wanted him to sign up with them. He had silver medals also for Ping Pong, before it became known as table tennis. He was also a very keen cricket player and gave my younger brother Colin his old cricket caps. These caps had extra large peaks, of which Colin loved to wear.

George's mother, Sally, had the most magnificent Dresden ornaments, which she would proudly show me. A few larger and very beautiful porcelain examples, of the like of which I have never seen since, stood on her living room sideboard for many years. She had purchased them in the early 1900's from Petticoat Lane. They would be worth a huge amount of money today.

I remember how my mum would toil at doing the washing in the back yard. Even on hot summer days she would be working away doing the family washing in a galvanised tin bath. Her arms would be working away, scrubbing the heavy blankets, along with the pile of family clothing and towels etc. She would then hand rinse everything before putting it all through the big old mangle.

Mum would ask me to turn the handle and would often chastise me for not turning the handle fast enough; she'd say things such as, "Why can't you even manage to do this for me!" I would say to her, 'Why can't you use the bag wash mum?' and her stern reply was, "What! And mix our washing with other people's dirty washing!"

The 'Bag Wash' was a service that called on homes on a regular basis, calling at the neighbours. I recall the name of the firm was Palmer's Bag Wash. Their van would slowly struggle up Sladedale Road. I remember their slogan that was written on their van. It said, "Why kill your wife, let us do it for you!"

The first house up from Welsh the greengrocers, on Parkdale Road, was the home of the Marshall family. Mrs Marshall made toffee apples and sold them cheaply to us kids. She also worked at the Plaza cinema, along Plumstead High Street. If she spotted me entering the cinema she'd have a word with the box office and I'd get in free. She was a lovely lady, who, like her husband, was always friendly to all.

Their son Howard, who was older than me, often took me swimming in Plumstead baths and afterwards we'd go to a café, close to the Police Station on the High St. He introduced me to black coffee and lemon drink. Howard was the first person to tell me that I should put a parting in my hair! He had a younger sister Marion, who in later years I met at the East Ham Town Hall dance with two of her friends, Eddie, Tracy's sister, I forget her name, and Valerie Atkins from Roydene Road. .... I really liked Marion.



*Earlier styled heading from 1922.*

# Memories Of A Young Plumstead Girl

Jacqueline Willmott

I was born in Barth Road just off Plumstead High St in 1946. It was a small terraced house, no bathroom as such and an outside toilet. Nearly every house in the road had children so we would all play together, games such as British Bull Dog, hopping across the road on one leg trying to knock some one over. There were few cars to contend with so the road was our playground.

I went to Conway Road Junior School, so I had to walk up the bottom half of Lakedale Road through the shopping area four times a day. I used to go home for lunch every day and would dread it if it was the beer delivery day at the Volunteer pub in the high street. Those big Shire horses would try and nip you as you passed by them!

A friend of mine lived in Tewson Road, directly opposite the entrance to St Nicholas Hospital (now a housing estate). We would either play on the bomb site in front of the hospital or further up on the Common. We loved to climb the Monkey Trees there, as we called them, situated next to the hospital wall, way over the back of the Common. One of us would have to go to the top of Lakedale Rd. every now and then to see what the time was, as the big Co-op clock was visible from there.

There was a playground on the Common with a paddling pool in it; if you needed a drink that was the place to go; it had a water fountain with a metal cup attached to a chain. On the other side of the road was a deep ravine with lots of steps leading down to it. At the bottom was a big pond; always had a fence round it. We never played down there, for some reason.



Coronation Street Party (1953) in Barth Street.

Photos: John Singleton.

John is fourth from left, second row, holding dish mop and baby, going as, 'Don't forget Fathers Day' (because it was Fathers Day.) John says "My mother painted a black eye on me and gave a big lipstick kiss on my cheek".



Coronation Street Party (1953) in Barth Street.

We spent many hours at the swimming baths, along next to the Library in the High St. Saturday morning was great. All of us went to the pictures; I think it used to cost sixpence. We used to go the Century; there was a new ABC cinema built around that time, in Wellington St in Woolwich.

When we acquired roller skates we used to roller-skate alongside the Arsenal wall all the way to Woolwich. We would go down to the foot tunnel that took you under the Thames to North Woolwich, then we would catch the ferry back again, all for free! We had so much freedom then; as long as you were back for your meals no one worried about you.



*Conway Road Junior School c1954.*

*Top Row: ?, Graham Hooper Middle row: ?, ?, Jacqueline Alcorn (now Willmott) (Do you recognise yourself or a classmate?)*

My father used to rent a few acres of land from the council in Abbey Wood. It is now a huge council estate called Thamesmead. At that time it was all fields; my friend and I would wander down to see him on a Sunday morning, through the fields and through a gypsy encampment all on our own, with no thought of being harmed.

I remember going to school at one time with a torch to cross over Plumstead High St. The smog was so thick you could not see the traffic coming; we certainly do not miss those smoggy days.



*An early photo of Gypsy encampment.*

# *Memories Of Being Evacuated In 1939*

*Anne Openage*

The Year 1939.

The war started when I was a child of nine. We lived in Plumstead. Quite a few of the adults in my area worked at the Woolwich Arsenal, which was a huge ammunition factory with an historical background.



My parents thought it would be best for me to be evacuated with the school. Of course, I thought, 'Oh yes, a holiday.' So I was looking forward to it all.

When the big day arrived I remember standing on the platform on Plumstead Station at about 8 am with about a hundred other children, the youngest of which was about six years old. I was holding one small suitcase and a haversack; this was all we were allowed to have. We, of course, all had a gas mask and a label attached to us with our name and school written on it. I think

there were only two school groups at the station that day.

We eventually boarded the train, and it became packed solid. There was no corridor on the train and our compartment was completely jammed. Once on the train we were given a pound bar of chocolate each. But during the whole journey we did not have a drink. None of us was told where we were going, including our parents and teachers. Just the train driver! It was all very hush hush.

Our parents were not allowed on the station platform and I recall my mother looking at us over the fence with all the other mothers. Most were crying, and so were we. The blinds on the carriages were all drawn and I know we were all very nervous.

One and a half hours later we pulled into a station: Tunbridge Wells, Kent. From there we were taken to Pembury, a small village. Next, we were taken to the local school, where we all waited. A steady stream of adults arrived; they chose the children they wanted and off they went. I was amongst the last six girls to be chosen. At last we were chosen! By now it was about 8 pm.

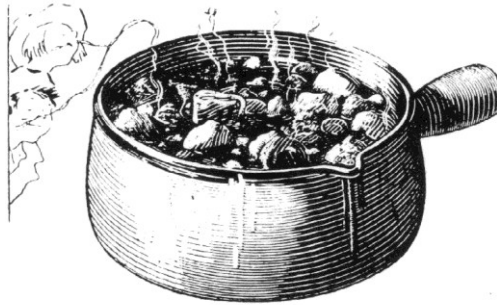
Four of us girls were taken to a large farmhouse and made very welcome by Mr and Mrs Sturgeon. Mrs Sturgeon had lost a baby girl the year before but she also had another little girl. So now she had five girls to look after! We all got on very well. My main job was taking the dog out. I stayed there a year and half and, apart from a touch of homesickness, we experienced a new kind of life.



Two small evacuees WWII.

Editor's footnote: Photos were added to the original story.

WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at [bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](http://bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar)



## YOUR EVACUEES!

Extra mouths to feed  
To make the most and get the best  
out of every scrap of meat

use

# BISTO



*DON'T do it,  
Mother—*

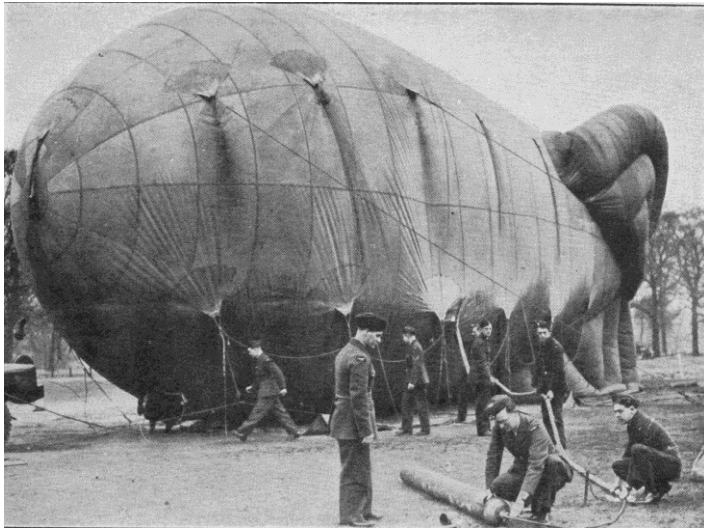
**LEAVE THE CHILDREN  
WHERE THEY ARE**

# Memories Of Childhood

Alan West

My earliest memories are of the barrage balloons tethered to cables and being pulled down by a huge drum winch, situated in front of the Co-op buildings at the Links. Also the underground public air raid shelter, situated at the same site.

In the winter of 1947 there were very heavy and deep snow falls. My grandfather had to clear access to our house, as the arrival of my new sister was imminent. The snow proved to



*Preparing a barrage balloon.*



*The Links shops, Plumstead Common Road, c.1905  
. Photo: Greenwich Heritage Centre.*

be more fun than my new noisy baby sister though! I was then frequently shunted off to other adults after she arrived. One such adult was Harry Finch, who had a shop in Waverley Crescent and also a garage backing onto it, in Villas Road. I spent many happy childhood hours here and acquired a lifelong interest in the motor trade. Next door to the shop was a baker, owned by relatives of the Finches, who were of German/Austrian extraction and had been refugees. Uncle Werner was an imposing figure who always had superb cakes at hand! As Harry had one of the very few usable cars available after the war, groceries for special customers were delivered, usually while driving Dr Wise around on house calls.

One particularly grand house was Powis Lodge, situated behind St Margaret's. It had a huge garden, that was typically Victorian, full of statues and was also abundant in wildlife. The occupants were two spinsters and an artistic nephew

Jidge. The house of Dr Wise in Burrage Road also seemed huge. Quite often I was taken into the consulting room to observe the patients. Then, at the mid morning break, I had to recount to the Doctor what I had observed, while sherry and biscuits were consumed before the house calls, which could be fun!

Uncle Harry would drive Dr Henry and me around Plumstead. If the Doc lit up a cigarette before getting out there was a good chance I would be invited in, "To build up your resistance young man." Frequently, as we were leaving one of the little terraced houses, one of the residents would hover near the front door to see us out and after a short muttered conversation Dr Henry would explain that now, with the new system, there was no need to worry about paying, although often enough something wrapped up (and dead) would be discreetly handed over to him!



*Alan West, Conway School.*

1947 was a memorable year for me. My first visit to St



*Heavitree Road c1905.*

*Photo: Greenwich Heritage Centre.*

Nick's

was with a broken leg and the first time I saw a television, which was in the Lord Raglan pub, was to watch, I think, some grand Royal event.

Early Common memories were, an assortment of old boys sitting near the bowling green in Waverley Crescent with various limbs missing, they were probably WWI veterans. Opposite where they were sitting there was a large hill, possibly another public air raid shelter.

I think. Heavitree Road provided us kids with an adventure playground of large bombed out houses with only the cellars left, which had very ornate tiling.

At Conway Primary School my first classroom was next to a room that had lots of mini beds. I never got to have a siesta there though! Milk was dished out with cod liver oil and malt, much better than the capsules, although if you could get the top off the milk carefully and drop a capsule in and replace the top it was fun watching who got it and whether they started to drink it before the curdling had started! I have remained in touch with my two 'minders' who were a couple of years older than I. They prevented any problems for me and it also



*This class photo was our Induction Class photo, taken on the slopping playground, hence the leaning left, of Conway Infants School, in 1950.*

meant that I was invited to play cricket and other games with the big boys.

The first teacher I remember was Miss Weeks. [It must have been very early days of pointed bras] All the teachers were probably very young. Others I recall are, Mr Mockeridge, Mr Lovatt, Mr Jenkins, Mr Given, Mr Ellison, Miss Hancock, and Miss Carruthers.

Mr Given had a motorcycle combination with a very pretty young lady passenger (King's Warren uniform). Somehow, he recognised me some 15 years later, when I had a petrol station in Blackwall Lane!

Mr Jenkins, my last teacher, had an auto cycle, (a bicycle with a small motor) which was repaired in class, my first lessons in small engines!

The Headmaster was Cyril Bull, who was also a local JP. Cakes were always available at his house, (situated in Grosmont Road, on Winn's Common, by a car breakers yard) even if he found us caving nearby; I think this was near to Grosmont or Purrett Roads, in the very sandy soil around those areas. The council later erected flats on this same land.

The first time I remember the Tannoy speaker system being used at Conway School was in 1952, when we were called to the assembly hall to be told the King was dead. I think we were then sent home.

The next year we all trooped along to the cinema near Plumstead Police Station to see the film, 'The Conquest of Everest.'



*St Patrick's School, Griffin Rd. (Boy's playground is up on the roof.) Photo: Bert Hooper c1997. I could ever remember.*

Coronation celebrations included the school giving out commemorative gifts and the street parties had mums dressed in more colourful clothes than

War with St Patrick's RC School, on the corner of Griffin and Conway Roads, was a permanent war in our junior school days. (The girls were, I thought, rather attractive when dressed in white, on their confirmation day) however, it was a radical change when these young ladies went on to Ursuline Convent School in Blackheath.

School uniform was instigated during our time at Conway. We were told how the castle motif on our school badge was modelled on Conway Castle in North Wales.

I was usually the wicket keeper in the school cricket team. Matches were played opposite The Brown School, (King's Warren) in Old Mill Road. The end of the match was the best bit, when teachers and enthusiastic parents adjourned to the Woodman Pub or The Old Mill for post match celebrations.

During the thick London smogs we kids actually looked forward to being out in them. Adults were often completely lost while some of us developed the ability to recognise where we were, by remembering the front walls and gateposts of the neighbourhood houses. On one occasion, during one of these thick smogs, my mother and I helped to get some younger kids safely over to the Links. Strangely, from Conway Road to the top of Griffin Road we were all invisible in the smog. Yet, when we got to the Common the taller adults heads were visible above the smog while all us kids were still invisible, engulfed in the acidic murk, the taste of which was horrible.

My last year at Conway was enlivened by the school journey to the Isle of White. Memorable events were a car rally along the sea front, also stressing teachers out on the ferry crossings. It was great fun and the trips were even better than our short trips on the Woolwich Ferry!

I recall the reopening of the Ravine pond pools just after the war, after they were cleaned up. The pipe entering the top pond went up and branched off towards Slade School and the other towards the Working Men's, as best as I can remember. There were lots of bats up the pipe past the intersection. At one time I saw snakes of some sort swim across the top pond, (probably grass snakes) also plenty of newts. Occasionally, slow worms could be found among the gorse bushes. The jungle above St Nick's (Hospital grounds) also



*The children and teachers on the Sandown, Isle of Wight, school trip, 1954/55.*

*I am second row from back, 8th from left.*

was good for wildlife nature hunting, if we didn't take noisy whinging kids with us! The fence wasn't any better years later, when we needed to smuggle young ladies back in

after hours!

Boney's sweetshop, which smelt of battery acid (used for recharging the radio battery accumulators) gave us money for empty lemonade bottles which he stored in the alley way at the side of shop, where they



were liberated by kids and

*The Cub Parade was in Brewery Road at the junction of Griffin Road in 1953, outside East Plumstead Baptist Church. I am the Standard Bearer. We marched to Woolwich on the annual St George's Day Parade.*

resold back to him! They must have been recycled so many times! Neighbours paid us to take their radio batteries, which were big glass accumulators, for recharging. A scrap paper merchant was based in the street opposite, Elmley or Robert Street.

Collecting horse manure was another good earner. Gardeners were always willing to pay us for this valuable commodity and their wives sometimes paid us with cake or fruit tarts etc., all very desirable for growing lads! More bonuses could be gained by following the Co-op or Beasley Brewery dray horses. A food offering made to these horses when at rest often produced quick results!

Most homes had a vegetable garden, especially just after the war years when things were in short supply; many folk were breeding chickens and rabbits for their tables. On one occasion I remember we were in a brand new Austin A90, a company car, that was being used to transport some of my dad's cricket team mates from Gillingham to Plumstead with a very large and very noisy pig in the boot, liberated from somewhere in Kent! I think it met its end in Burrage Road, because everyone seemed to be eating pork all of a sudden!

Firework night left a lasting memory. "Flash Bangs" (firecrackers to simulate live fire) surplus from the Home Guard, were tied to the wood paling fence in the garden and lit, the fence going up in flames was brilliant I thought, and the war issue stirrup pump had to be deployed to extinguish the fence. The next door neighbour was most upset though, because his rabbits almost got roasted in their hutches! The disused Anderson shelters made brilliant dens for us boys to chat. They were usually full of creepy crawlies that conveniently kept any nosey sisters away! When we were allowed into the Beasley Brewery stables, the Shire horses, which were huge, were really docile animals. But when out working some appeared to be real handfuls, maybe it was something to do

with the use of those huge whips or, perhaps, the liquid refreshment taken by their driver's at every delivery! Those horses were seriously strong. I vividly remember the carnage many years later when a dray and horses bolted into a house, in the lower part of Ancona Road. Similarly, the milkman's horse and float that went through the railway fence and down the embankment on the up side of Plumstead Station.

Builders sent to repair our house, on war damage repair work some years after the war, failed to get our front door and frame to line up, so they carefully cut a pane of glass trapezium shaped to fill the gap; they said it was to compensate for a bit of tilt!

Most days I was sent to get bread at the bottom of Griffin Road; watching the chaos relieved the monotony of queuing. Trolley buses and trams were often forced to a stop when their conductor poles left the cables above, causing delays while the huge pole was taken out and used to try and lift the contacts back onto the power lines.

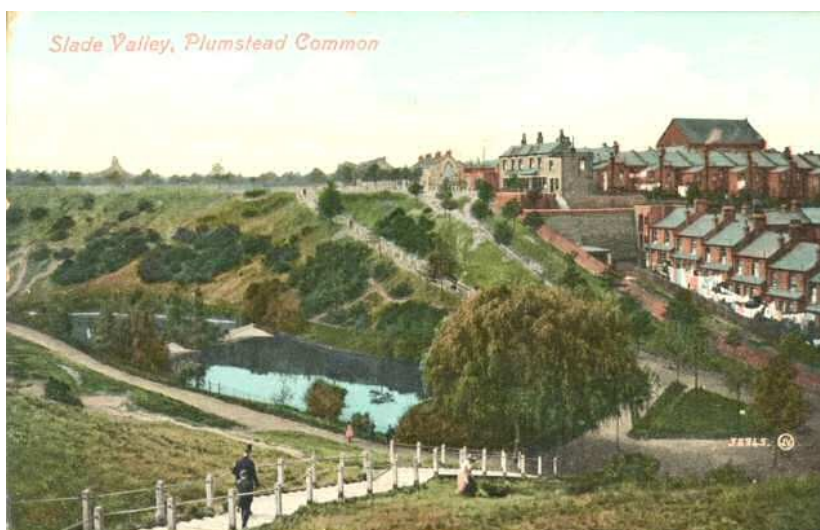
Practically all the Arsenal workers rode bicycles and so would weave in and out. But whenever a bike wheel got stuck in a tram rail groove, look out! Even cars behaved strangely on the wet cobbles and these tram tracks if they had bald tyres, (bald was quite normal until some politician thought up '10 year tests').

My grandfather worked in the Arsenal, in Naval Ordnance, for some years after the war. He usually took me to Woolwich when the huge 'Queen Mary' trailers that contained glider kits tried to manoeuvre around Woolwich. Being 60 ft long without a tractor unit some drivers got into a right mess. (Many drivers had passed armed forces driving tests, i.e. if you moved the vehicle you got a driver's licence!) The exception being Tiny and his mate who drove tank transporters, Diamond T before the Mighty Antars came in, loaded with a tank from the Arsenal to Artillery Place, the tanks, often still in German livery. As I remember it seemed Saturday was the preferred day to do this, I didn't know why, but it caused chaos through the Square and up Greens End. The tanks often came into contact with the overhanging first floor buildings, even with lots of onlookers assisting, plus street fittings had to be removed for extra clearance. Transporter and tank often sat on the Artillery Parade Ground for days before they eventually drove off

somewhere, at a slow snail's pace.

As a Cub I can remember being taught various Scouting activities in the grounds of the East Plumstead Baptist Church with the 12th Woolwich Troop.

Visits to Plumstead Common were somewhat restricted, probably because of our Akela not being able to



*Early post-card depicting Slade Valley ponds, Plumstead Common.*

*Photo: Greenwich Heritage Centre.*

control our pyromaniac intentions on open land. We did visit a church near the ravine on different occasions, during get togethers with other troops. On these occasions there always appeared to be more adults around, maybe, as I suspected, to stop our very youthful excesses of exuberance. I'm fairly sure that the church was St Mark's.

Camping trips were designed to get us unruly young creatures as far as possible from our home territory. Our local expeditions were to Meopham but our annual camp was much further away.

The annual trip I particularly remember was to the farm belonging to Harold Macmillan, the then Prime Minister. A few years before, his election slogan was 'Back Mac'. We were transported to Wiltshire in the back of a furniture pantechnicon with large amounts of kit. The lorry didn't make it all the way though. We had quite a few breakdowns and we were eventually towed to our campsite in the finish. However, most trips in those days were made a whole lot more interesting by the 'Gone Wrong factor!'

Most Sunday School trips were much more fun when things went wrong, especially on one memorable occasion when our coach had to park alongside a field which contained a herd of cows. The adults encouraged us to watch them to keep us occupied, that was until they realised we were all being given a serious sex education lesson, courtesy of the bull who was in the field to do his mating business! I still remember the great glee of some of us and the huge embarrassment shown on the faces of some of the rather more demure Sunday School teachers (both male and female).



*Conway School Class in 1954/55, top class (1A). I am second left, second row from back.*

# *Memories Of A Young Girl Growing Up In Plumstead*

*Lynda French (nee Stevens)*

I was born in St Nicholas' Hospital, in 1954, which is now a housing estate.

I lived in Plumstead, in Marmadon Road, backing on to the railway line and the truck marshalling yard. One of my favourite memories was listening to the men as they played cricket during the hot summer months whilst they waited for the next load of trucks to come in. Waving to the train drivers was another favourite occupation (steam trains of course) and I remember getting quite excited about the advent of diesel locomotives and then, later on, electric trains. Steam trains remain my favourite to this day though.

Ted and his horse 'Wayfarer' delivered the milk, until Ted got a pull cart and Wayfarer was put out to grass. The beer was delivered to the pub on the High Street by beautiful dray horses.

Sunday School at the Salvation Army Headquarters was another fond memory. Brownies was great too, but mainly because they had an indoor toilet that didn't have spiders that we had at home!

We bathed in the old tin bath that always hung on the wall in the garden (which fell on the cat once!).

My mum lived in Plumstead all her life and once lived next to a chip shop, which I believe was on the corner of the High Street and Barth Road. My dad was a Charlton man.

We went to school, my sister Kim and me, at Bannockburn Nursery School. (I'm the little sad faced girl in the back row, second child in, in photo.)



*Bannockburn Nursery School, c.1959. Photo: Lynda French.  
Lynda Stevens (now French) is in the back row, second in on the left.*

My uncle, Arthur Smith, lived on the Common with his family and I thought them quite posh. My auntie Ruth lived in Purrett Road, by the Police Station.

I remember the 'Rest Centre' where several of my mates lived. I remember the pet shop in the High Street that sold exotic animals like monkeys (unheard of nowadays).

### **Woolwich Market and the Ferry**

All the ferryboats had names, but they escape me now. I seem to remember John Benn was one of them. Crossing the river and looking at the magnificent engines operating was a particular treat. When we were old enough we would walk to Woolwich to save the bus fare. Then we'd cross the river on the ferry and walk or roller skate back through the tunnel.

On Saturday mornings were the pictures, ... bliss!

There was a shop in the market that sold eels, wriggling in tanks in the window.

I remember queuing to see 'Summer Holiday' at the ABC cinema.

The swimming baths and the museum were other places that we spent countless hours playing and exploring. Our playground consisted of Plumstead marshes, including the sewer banks, Plumstead Gardens and Bostall Woods.

Catching butterflies, running through the autumn leaves, generally with not a care in the world; all the summers were hot and sunny (weren't they?). Most of all though, I always felt safe!

After Bannockburn, I went to Abbey Wood Comprehensive for a year before we moved to Kent, when I was twelve and my sister was ten, in 1966.

I have lived in Kent ever since and although I won't say I don't enjoy my life here, it certainly doesn't hold the fond memories that I have of my old home back in Plumstead.



# *Memories Of Eglinton Road School*

## *1943-1949*

*Roy Earnshaw*

I was born in a nursing home at Blackheath. I lived in Donaldson Road, Shooters Hill. I was recently informed Shooters Hill was so named because archers trained there in days of yore. My first day at school I remember because I was feeling very insecure and during a break my elder brother Eric, who was in his last year at the school, sought me out to check that I was all right and cheer me up a bit.

The strongest recollections I have though were the time spent in Miss Fisher's class. She was a very strict no nonsense lady and I don't ever remember anyone stepping out of line. There were about 34 in the class and I believe something like 30 of us passed the 11 plus exam, which is some testament to her teaching ability. Miss Richards was the Headmistress during my time.

Playtime of course was spent playing football and cricket in the playground and I particularly remember one lad bringing three stumps in a wooden block as a wicket, which was some advance on the usual wicket using chalk on a brick wall. We also had very occasional school trips after the war and I remember a day out to London and also a local visit to Eltham to a horticultural centre. In my later stages at the School, in about 1949, I ran in the Woolwich Schools District sports held at the Royal Academy Ground and finished second in the 10-11 age group in the 100 yards.

We children were all from working class families and initially the war was still on and the early years after the war were still very lean times. Ration books still dominated shopping and my parents kept chickens and rabbits to supplement our food supply. We also benefited



*Eglinton Road School - Nativity play 1948. Photo: Roy Earnshaw.*

*L to R: Alan B?, John Tunstall, Roy Earnshaw, Pat Dillon.*

*Note: I did not perform in the play but stood in for the "real" King for the photograph as he was absent, sick.*

from the occasional food parcel from an aunt living in Canada and as children we were told about exotic fruit such as bananas and could only wonder what the taste would be like.

We also had an air raid shelter in the back garden, known as an Anderson shelter I think, but many of these became water logged and I remember in the middle of the night going to the dry shelter of a neighbour. Later in the

war we were supplied with an indoor one called a Morrison shelter, which we had installed in the living room. We were very lucky that we were never bombed out of our house but doodlebugs came very close and I also remember a barrage balloon called Maggie getting loose from her moorings.

I saw my first professional football match during the war: about age five. My father and brother took me to the Valley to see Charlton Athletic. For me it



*The Bull Hotel, Shooters Hill c.1950. Photo: Roy Earnshaw.*

was the beginning of a love affair with the 'Addicks', which lasts to this day, and although I have long since left Shooters Hill, since retirement I am now able to attend home games on a regular basis. Crowds were vast all over the land in those days, as very little other entertainment existed. We always walked over Woolwich Common to the ground, although sometimes dad's shoulders carried me along.

Sport dominated many lives and we were fortunate to have Shrewsbury Park not that far away and played there for hours and hours. The Shrewsbury Park area was also memorable to me for another reason. The first bike I ever had was a very old second-hand bone shaker that my dad renovated for me, but I was forbidden to ride it until the brakes were fixed.


However when my dad was at work I could wait no longer to use it and went up to the Shrewsbury Park flat area with a friend to try it out with the intention of getting off and walking down the very hilly part back home. However my judgement was faulty and before I could dismount I had gathered too much pace and was soon speeding down Eglinton Hill. I knew at the bottom it was crossed by Herbert Road and its traffic. On the way down a lady stepped off the kerb to cross the road and I managed to swerve a bit and avoid her, calling out an apology as I sped by. Fortunately the traffic along Herbert Road in those days was very much quieter than by modern day



*At the 'Valley,' Charlton vs. Arsenal, a plane spotter watches the skies in 1940 during WWII. (Crowds were kept to limited numbers during the war)*

standards and I shot across unscathed gradually slowing down near a convent school. I did not remain unscathed when my dad found out though.

LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL.



*Edgecombe Road School.*

**Report on Attendance, Conduct and Progress,**  
for the Elementary School Year ended *July 1947.*

Name *Roy Earnshaw.* No. of Pupils in Class: *39.*

Class or Standard *4.* Attendance Place in Class: *14*

Note—Ex. : Excellent ; V.G. : Very Good ; G. : Good ; V.F. : Very Fair ; F. : Fair.

Religious Knowledge	<i>English</i> $\frac{13}{20}$	Additional Subjects
Reading $\frac{9}{20}$	<i>Handwriting</i> $\frac{15}{20}$	
Spelling $\frac{16}{20}$	Arithmetic $\frac{15}{20}$	
Composition $\frac{12}{20}$	Science	
Practical Work	Drawing	
Needlework	Geography	
	History	

CONDUCT : *V.G.*

REMARKS : *Class work better than examination result.*

*S.W.E. Earnshaw.* Parent's Signature

*T. B. Fisher* Class-Master  
Class Mistress.

*G. Richards.* Head-Mistress  
Head Mistress.

Form  $\frac{E}{5}$

400,000—(H. 1733/21b) 31.7.35

*Roy Earnshaw's Edgecombe Road School report, July 1947.*

Our house also backed onto Shooters Hill Grammar School and playing fields, which was a regular illegal playground for nearby children. We were often chased off by the school keeper and his Alsatian dog but always lived to tell the tale. Saturday morning pictures was hugely popular and I used to go to the Granada Woolwich, which would be packed out with children watching Cowboys and Indians with much cheering and booing. Powis Street, Woolwich was the main shopping area plus Beresford St Market. But daily shopping, no refrigerators or freezers in those days, was carried out in Herbert Road.

Another source of entertainment, although very modest by today's standards, was a trip on the Woolwich Free Ferry and to marvel at the workings of the big engines. It was all pretty simple stuff but we were also fortunate to have several other parks and woods as nearby playgrounds.

Many things of course about those days are long forgotten but very few of us, if any, would ever have imagined what our lives would be like in the 21 first century.

November 2006

# Memories Of Evacuation

*This story was submitted by the Greenwich Heritage Centre's*

*Chris Ford on behalf of Kitty Liddle*

I was nine years old when the Second World War began, on Sunday 3rd September 1939. That day was the first of very many times that I would hear the air raid siren wail its warning. I remember being prepared for the evacuation, which was mostly consisting of London children who were being sent away to the countryside for safety. I was living in Majendie Road, Plumstead and I went to Elmley Road School. Along with others from my school we were taken to Plumstead Railway Station, all of us with a label attached to our coats. For some reason we were all sent back home, and no one was more surprised than my



mum when she saw me back on the doorstep. As a result I was sent to stay with an unknown distant aunt who lived a long way from London (In fact it was Ottershaw in Surrey). I received some sort of schooling there but all I can remember is acting in Shakespeare's, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' and learning how to spell 'melancholy'.

I stayed happily in Ottershaw for a while but when my uncle

died I was sent back home to stay with my father's sister and her family in Eltham. I attended the local Henwick Road School. My two cousins and uncle helped me a great deal with my homework and it is with thanks to them that I passed my 11 plus examination. My aunt suffered with sever arthritis and hardly went out, so it fell to me to pick up some of the shopping on my way from my new school, Eltham Hill. My aunt smoked Black Cat cigarettes. I would get these for her from the Co-op in Well Hall Road, Eltham. Each time I had to ask the assistant in a whisper if she had some matches, one of the many items almost unobtainable during the war. These were only sold to you if cigarettes were sold with them. They then passed them quickly to you from under the counter so as not to be noticed. Some mornings, before school, I had to go to Mitchell's the butchers, also in Well Hall Rd. There was always a queue for your meat ration and one day I fainted whilst waiting my turn. When I revived I was sitting in a chair and was very pleased to be able to go to the front of the queue. It was at this time



*Under the counter 'Goodies'.*

that the bombing of London was at its height and every night we ritually made ready to spend the night in the air raid shelter in the garden. I had a wind-up gramophone and some records which I played to deaden the noise of what was happening outside. I can remember seeing, by candlelight, the condensation running down the inside walls of the corrugated iron. One night, raiders came early and my aunt, who was always the last in the shelter, (her arthritis made it difficult for her to move very quickly) was just about to enter the shelter when a bomb blast split the seam of the back of her coat. Another time I was coming home from school when suddenly an enemy aeroplane swooped down and fired at men working on the roofs of bombed houses in Rochester Way. I hid behind a bush in someone's front garden until it was safe to continue my journey home.

My mother had been working in Siemens in Charlton and then in the Woolwich Arsenal all this time. In 1943, when I was 13 years old, I went back to live in my own home in Plumstead. I went to Woolwich Central School, Bloomfield Road, until 1946.

At 14 years old I lost my very best friend who died of rheumatic fever, thought to have come from the dampness in the air raid shelters. She lived in Plum Lane in Plumstead. Her name was Hazel Evens. She was very talented and clever at making things. I missed her very much indeed. The war ended May 1945.



*Siemens Telegraph Works, Charlton.*

*Editor's footnote: Photos were added to the original story.*

*'WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at [bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](http://bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar)'*

# *Memories Of Plumstead Common And King's Warren School*

*Sheila Andrews*

I cannot claim to be a true Plumstead Commoner, as we only moved to Ebenezer Terrace about thirty-five years ago, but my forebears have lived in the Woolwich and Plumstead area since at least 1800, maybe more. I was born in Plumstead Road, not far from the Middle Gate. We frequently trudged up Maxey Road, up the steps, along Hudson Road, past St Margaret's and along Blendon Terrace to go to the Globe Cinema.

We used to show a bill for their programmes, which was viewed by people on the passing trams, for which we received a complimentary pass for two people per week. By 1935 there were 'picture palaces' being built in Woolwich, the Odeon and Granada, which were truly magnificent. The Globe was an early 'Palace,' probably 1920 'ish, and by the 1940s was showing its age. The brass work outside was still gleaming, but I did not know it in its heyday. There used to be a corner shop by the bridge in Maxey Road kept by Ernie Rodgers and his sister. They also showed the bill, and had a pass, but Ernie was disabled and they very rarely used their pass.

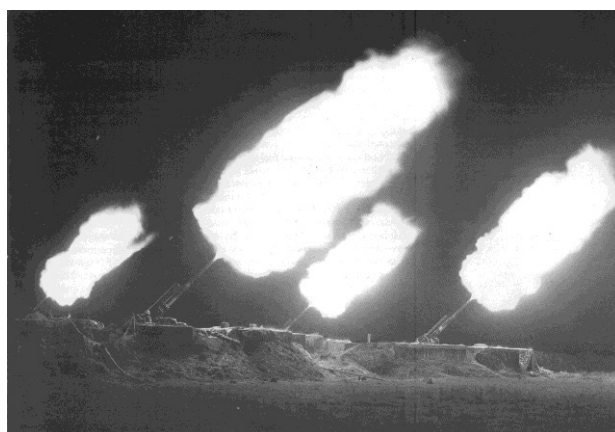
There were four of us. My father died in 1928 but my mother and two brothers were film devotees so Ernie would lend us his pass sometimes. My big brother, on these occasions, would wear a cap to age him sufficiently to pass as Mr Rodgers.

During the war my brothers were in the Navy and friends who lived in Plum Lane invited mum and I to share their cellar shelter when the raids began, as they thought we were not in a good position, right opposite the Arsenal wall. Their invitation was so pressing that we agreed. The raid had already started when we set off. To protect the Arsenal and the Docks, there was always a very heavy barrage set up to discourage the bombers a bit. When the shells exploded there was shrapnel galore. Air Raid Wardens had tin hats but



*Sheila Andrews with her mother in 1938. (In the background is some of the Arsenal wall, now demolished)*

*Photo: Sheila Andrews.*



*Barrage of anti aircraft guns.*

we were not so equipped and I well remember the shrapnel pinging down and bouncing up off the road in Blendon Terrace. We kept to the trees on the Common side, which wouldn't have protected us much anyway, but luckily we were not shredded and got to Plum Lane



*'The Brown School' (now Plumstead Manor) in Old Mill Road, on the right of pub. In Plumstead the grammar school for girls was Kings Warren, or The Brown School, because their uniform was brown.*

*In this 1940 photo, the man with the white coat and handcart was the milkman, or the ice cream seller, standing in Warwick Terrace, where the 53 bus route started.*

*Photo and text: Derek Crompton.*

unharmd. We found the cellar full of friends, and every sort of seating that could be found for so many, from deck chairs to stools. The comfiest seating was allocated according to age, and at thirteen years my priority was low. The next morning we emerged aching in every limb ("death where is thy sting, where grave thy victory"), so we spent the journey back home concocting an acceptable excuse, in order not to hurt the feelings of our friends, which we duly delivered the next night. Shortly afterwards their firm was moved to Illminster in Somerset, so all was well.

Ebenezer Terrace was built in 1848 and is the oldest terrace on the Common. There used to be stucco fancy work over our house, with the name and date, but it was leaning forward three inches, according to the cracks in the party walls in the roof space, and we could not risk it all descending on us on the front steps, so very reluctantly had to have it removed. These buildings are listed by the Council, but they were so short of cash they could not help, asking to keep the pictures my husband had taken, in case money should ever be available to restore it, but I doubt this happy time will ever come.

The terrace used to have quite high railings in the front but they were all taken for scrap during the war. The houses on the far end by Vernham Road were damaged by bombing, when the stucco on that end disappeared. The only example still remaining is over No. 100. Before 1848 there were potteries on the site, and in Vernham Road. When gardening we

unearthed a lot of large glazed blocks and lumps, which had been buried. I was in hopes we had discovered a kiln in situ, but no such luck. I thought perhaps it might be the inside of a salt glazing kiln. I imagine that throwing in a handful of salt to volatilise would glaze the interior as well as the items being fired, but I do not know enough about the process to say. On the other side of Vernham corner, there is a house which used to be called "Lugano." Cottingham's College was on the site now occupied by the old peoples' home. Cottingham's son spent his honeymoon in Lugano and the house, in Swiss style, was his surprise wedding present, I am not sure of the date. The patch of Common opposite here makes a good helicopter landing place when medics are required in a hurry for road accidents.

In 1936 I won a Junior County Scholarship, which was before the eleven plus and comprehensives etc. I started at King's Warren School in January 1937. The headmistress was then Miss Lillian Summers, whose super high-class tones, when addressing the assembled school I found quite unbelievable. I was three months behind the rest of my year, who had started in September (I had been in hospital) and they had had time to get used to it. Had the term "You cannot be serious" been coined at that time, I should have used it, but just had to think it.

School uniform was very strict. Dark brown gymslip with beige blouse in winter, with dark brown woollen stockings with double sections at the knees for hard wear. Summer was beige dresses, blazers if you could afford it, so I didn't get mine until 1938, and beige lisle stockings, which my brother referred to as my "Old Mother Riley's" (O.M.Rs for short). Nowadays it would be Norah Batty's. The school had been the County Secondary School, Plumstead, thus the school motto (CSSP) was Courage, Service, Sympathy and Patriotism. They celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the move to the Old Mill Road site while I was there. We paraded to St Mark's Church behind the school banner (embroidered by the botany mistress, Miss Spratt, I believe). Even cream gloves were mandatory with the uniform on this occasion. Afterwards we had cakes and ICE CREAM with tinned pineapple in the gym. As only shops had refrigerators in those days, this rumour caused a sensation in the ranks, bordering on disbelief until it actually materialised. Heaven only knows what the present pupils of Plumstead Manor would make of all this. 1938 was quite a different world. It is strange that even as little as a decade requires explanation to those who have not lived through it.

We used to have prayers every morning and the school keeper would attend in his uniform looking very smart. He was of mature years, and one morning he was accompanied by a tall, dark and handsome young man who was his new assistant. I was down the front in 1b at the time. During proceedings my friend Audrey grabbed my arm and said "Oh Sheila, I do feel weird" and promptly collapsed on me. I was hanging on to her with chairs shooting about in all directions, when the young man stepped forward, gathered Audrey up and carried her to the sick room in a positively Douglas Fairbanks fashion. When she recovered and came back to class rather grey looking, she asked me what had happened. I reported on proceedings and Audrey was aghast. "Whatever happened to my skirt?" said she, with a vision of the dreaded brown bloomers, suspenders and brown stockings on full view. But I was able to assure her that he had done the job properly and secured her skirt with his arm. "Did he?" said Audrey, brightening up immediately.



*The old cricket pitch. The grammar school for girls was Kings Warren, or 'The Brown School'. (Now Plumstead Manor) in Old Mill Road. The white building across the pitch is the Old Mill pub. c2000 . Photo: Alan Gibbs.*

The next morning there were no less than three young ladies, higher up the school, that succumbed to an attack of the vapours, and the young man had his work cut out to deal with the situation.

Miss Summers took immediate action and by

the very next morning he had been transferred to the Roan Boys, and the health of her pupils took an upturn, and life was no longer exciting. Spoil sport!

My brothers were on their yearly training (Royal Volunteer Reserve) in August 1939 with H.M.S. Coventry. It was supposed to be for two weeks, but we didn't see them for years. They were in Alexandria when war was declared. When they left my instructions were to look after mum, so I did not evacuate with the school, but stayed at home. There was no school for a whole year. Then a teacher started up in Bloomfield Woodwork Centre in Sandy Hill, setting homework and marking it for us.

As numbers grew they opened up Bloomfield Main School for boys and girls from all of the Plumstead schools. We were all settling in there nicely, when it was announced that the South East London Emergency Secondary School for girls was opening at the Roan Girls in Greenwich, and the boys at Colfe's in Lewisham. Naturally we did not want all this hassle, but it was that or lose our grants, so from 1940-1943 I attended there.

King's Warren became an Ambulance Station and a Fire Station, but a bomb destroyed half of it, though it was rebuilt after the war, and "you can't see the join." In 1940 the party walls of the houses in Warwick Terrace remained standing and it looked like a toast rack, with just rubble where the toast should have been.

In the 1930s we always walked to Plumstead Cemetery most Sundays to tend my father's grave. Everybody seemed to do it in those days, as we frequently met mysterious relatives that I did not know, also tending their graves. From Plumstead Road near the Middle Gate that is quite a hike. My mother had great difficulty in keeping afloat, as she didn't even qualify for the 10/- (50p) widow's pension, and jobs were unobtainable. But in those days everybody was in the same boat, or at least everybody that I knew? Nobody entertained the vast expectations of this day and age. We used to walk up Maxey Road, Richmond Hill and

round to Durham Rise, where we often met friends who were "Peculiar People," which was a very strict religious sect. The Plumstead Peculiars are given an entry in the 1911 Britannica, but I think they have all died out now, as our friends were leading lights in the movement. They would not have doctors or any medical treatment. There was an outbreak of typhoid and Lily nearly died. The authorities took a hand and she was taken to hospital willy nilly. There were several little chapels in Durham Rise: Baptists, Strict Baptists and Particular Strict Baptists. They seemed to get stricter as you went up the hill!

We then proceeded along Waverley Terrace, Old Mill Road, down and up the steps at the ravine to Winn's Common, which was not the lush prospect it is now, but stony and dusty, with just a few little chamomile daisies here and there, down King's Highway, where there used to be gypsy caravans on the right hand ravine. Then it was all along Wickham Lane,

which was all brickfields on the right, and on the left were allotments. When the Ayling Houses were built along there, there were tales of rhubarb coming up through the floorboards.

When we had weeded and watered the grave, Mum gave us the option of a tram ride home or an ice cream. As I was only six or seven, I would have opted for the tram but the boys, thirteen and fifteen, chose the ice cream usually, and gave me a piggy back home.



*Mourning card for the 700 who died in the Princess Alice tragedy off Woolwich. Kind permission of Liz Thompson.*

My grandmother, Louisa

Dodsworth, 1860-1916, as a child lived in Garland Road and my mother told me that she went to school in the Ascension Church Halls, behind the Ascension vicarage on Winn's Common (as confirmed by Ivy Runacres), all now demolished.

Louisa later trained as a nurse at the Woolwich Union Infirmary, which later became St Nicholas Hospital, all now closed. Even as late as about 1933 there was a workhouse there as well. The men wore a uniform of grey tweed suits (reminiscent of the demob. suit my husband was issued with circa 1948). The ladies wore pink dresses with grey shawls and bonnets - I dimly remember seeing them when I was very small.



*The Ascension Church Hall, School and vicarage, on corner of Lakedale and Winn's Common Road.*

Louisa was on duty in the Infirmary the night the survivors from the Princess Alice disaster were brought in, when, if they were not in time with the stomach pumps to get the river water out of them, they died of poisoning. Five hundred and fifty died, and it is still the greatest loss of life in a land-based disaster. There have been more at sea, but that is not the same problem, as this one necessitated identification and inquests that went on for months, depending on which county foreshore the bodies were washed up. Most of the inquests were held in the old Town Hall in what is now Calderwood Street, next to Woolwich Library. In 1878 this all proved a terrible problem. Their memorial is in Woolwich Cemetery off King's Highway.



*King's Highway.*



The Common seems to have had its fair share of disasters. According to W.T. Vincent, when the school (now St Margaret's) opened, a poor little chap died walking home alone during a blizzard. It was some time before the snow melted and he was found underneath a hedge in Swingate Lane. About twenty years ago a father bringing his children to school was shot in full view of all the parents and children. Mercifully, though, the Common is usually a peaceful and pleasant place to be, and long may it remain so. 2000.

# Memories Of When We Were Young

*Harry Lane, formerly Roger Herbert*



*Conway School Photo*

I think I started going to school when I was five years old. I never attended a nursery in those days as many parents (mums) did not have jobs and, unlike today, it was the man of the house who was the breadwinner and the wives stayed at home with the children. I think I started school late in 1949, after my birthday, which was in October, or maybe it was in the new year of 1950. Unlike some of the other children at the time I was quite illiterate and couldn't add  $2 + 2$  together, let alone read.

I attended Bannockburn Road Primary School, and was much of a loner there, as the other children didn't bother to talk to me, and I remember that no one wanted to play with me.

One day, when I had been there for about a year or so, one of the teachers (Mrs West) noticed that I used to play on my own, practising running or jumping or just playing with toys. When she asked why I was not playing with the others, I told her I had always played on my own as no one wanted to play with me, and they called me a dunce. This led to her questioning the whole class and I got the blame from them for not mixing, as well as the other boys in the class calling me a tell-tale-tit. After a while I tried to join in the games with the other kids but I just got pushed away, which led to them hitting me quite frequently.

We used a galvanised tin bath in those days, which had to be filled with hot water from the kettle. We took our bath in the scullery (kitchen) or in the living room, on view to everyone, and the bruises on my small body were very noticeable. When my mother noticed these bruises I told her I had fallen over. After a while the bruising got worse and my parents went to the school to find out the truth, which, unfortunately for me, led me to get beaten up even more! I remember the bullies well; one of the worst bullies lived at the bottom of Barth Road, where as I lived in the top half of the road.

My parents eventually moved me to Conway Road School, (which was actually in Galloson Road), which, I think, was early in 1952, when I had turned seven. I had no problems with bullies at this school and made many friends, but there was always the odd one who wanted to fight.

My English and Arithmetic were still appalling, but, being a whole lot happier, I learnt things much more quickly. It was here that I met Colin Weightman, and many others, some of whom have long since been forgotten, although I remember my childhood sweethearts, i.e.: June Hood, Judith Blanch and Elaine Turkington. June Hood was actually my Country Dancing partner on many occasions, and in class she sat next to Colin's then heartthrob, Carol Dickins.

One could even get a teatime meal after school was finished. A cup of cocoa and some jam

sandwiches for the princely sum of thru'pence (3d) if your parents had to go out for the evening, or you just wanted to stay for the games. These games were after tea, games such as billiards, or shuttlecock and a whole host of board games and puzzles, to keep you busy. In the evening from 7 pm there was also a Club Night where a whole host of activities took place. *\*See story: Conway School Youth Club.*

A few years later I can remember days when Colin and I got up to no-good, and we also played the age-old game of kiss-chase with many of the girls on Plumstead Common. They would run off and hide in the gorse bushes amongst the hollows at the rear of St Nicholas Hospital. The idea was for them to hide and when we found them we were entitled to a kiss, but in these modern times I think the boys are looking for something more than just a kiss!

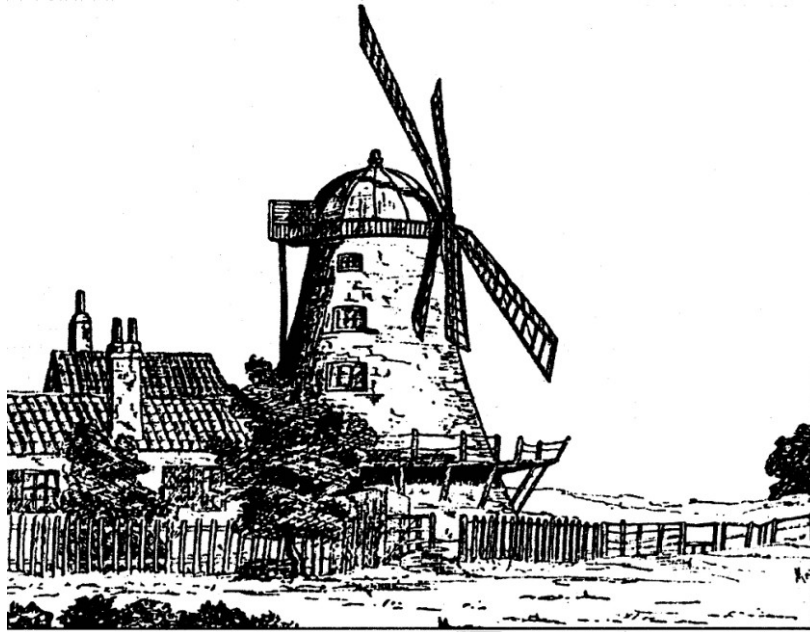
We also created a slide on the steep ground nearest to the road. We had an old mat and used to sit on it and slide down the hill. My parents got very angry when I wore a hole in the rear of my short trousers and my shoes were scuffed badly, as I used them as brakes.

Lakedale Road, (which, incidentally, was originally called Water Lane and then Cage Lane, way back in early Victorian times), ran northwards down hill, and divided the Common into two parts, the East and West as we allocated it.

On the west side there was a ravine pond, (the dirty lake) although more like a dirty old pond surrounded by a fence. Colin and I and a few others visited here during springtime, to get some frogs spawn. It was about three feet deep in those days, and at its most southerly end it was always dry in the late summer. There was always a hole in the fence somewhere where we could squeeze through to enter. There were frogs, toads, newts and sticklebacks everywhere in those days. I managed to slip and fall in one day and emerged with shoes full of smelly mud and remember everyone having a good laugh! Further west was the Old Mill, which dates back to the early 1700s.



*Looking down Lakedale Road, Cage Lane Mission with Beasley Brewery gates in the distance c1910.  
Photo: Greenwich Heritage Centre.*



*The Old Mill in much earlier times.*

To the south is where the Slade School now stands, but history tells us that long ago this was the site of the 'Three Horses Inn' and a brook used to run from here down to what is now Plumstead High Street. During this same period there are many tales about the East Side and the sportsmen who frequented the area. In early times (1700's) bears were not unknown on Plumstead Common, and were hunted, together with other animals such as otters, badgers and foxes, a shilling being paid for every animal that was slaughtered. Polecats and even hedgehogs were also hunted, and a fee of fourpence (4d) was paid for every kill.

During the early 1800's the Plumstead Sparrow Club sprang up, and every member was fined if they did not send in to the Treasurer at least six dead sparrows, many of which were taken from Plumstead Common.

Like many places, sparrows are now a rare sight on Plumstead Common, but it still holds lots of memories for my childhood days, from chasing the girls to playing football and cricket, and swinging on a rope secured to one of the large trees. I have also spent many days in the paddling pool on Winn's Common, sailing various types of model boats and having good fun with my friends.

Winn's Common has quite a bit of open ground and as a teenager this is where I used to fly my radio controlled Spitfire, which eventually flew off in a northerly direction towards the river Thames when my batteries failed, and I never saw it again!

From Conway Road School, I went to Wickham Lane Secondary School in Abbey Wood, and quite a number of my class mates (including Colin) also attended this school.

I can remember paying a 1d or 2d bus fare until I reached 14, when half-fare passes were issued. The buses passed by the Church Manorway Girls School and it was not unusual to

spot some of my primary school sweethearts.

Six of the bullies from Bannockburn School attended Wickham Lane and they got quite a shock when they picked on me again as I had been learning Judo and Kung-Fu in my spare time, without telling anyone.

I passed an exam at this school, which allowed me to attend Woolwich Polytechnic, where I spent the rest of my school days, and gained my A levels. Later I attended night school to gain other qualifications, which was part of my apprenticeship training.

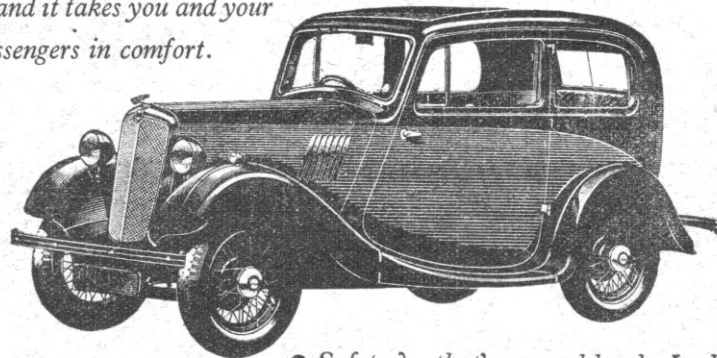
I still live in Plumstead, not far from the Common, and a walk from the Slade, down to the Ravine and across to the east side, always reminds me of those happy Childhood days I spent there with Colin and friends, so many years ago. We didn't have any of the luxuries we enjoy today, they were for the rich only, but my friends and I always say that they were happier days then.

Footnote: Harry and his wife have since moved to Eltham, just outside of Plumstead. 2008.

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# *Messerschmitt Bf 109E Crash*

*Ken Costin*

## **Wickham Street (Fanny on the Hill)**

Whilst collating the records of Civilian War Dead Records, (c.1994) I came across the mortuary record of a German Pilot 'Albert Friedmann'. These showed that 2nd Lieu Albert Friedmann of the German Air Force was burnt, had baled out and was found dead in a nearby field on Gibson Farm. He came from Leipzig Neusdorf. He is buried in Bexleyheath Cemetery, service grave E492.



*The plane, a yellow nosed Messerschmitt Bf 109E, crashed in the front garden of a cottage and on the verge of a roadway in Wickham Street on Sunday 20th October 1940.*

*Peter is the schoolboy with the cap on the right.*

Shortly afterwards I was walking with the Eynsford Walking Group and chatting with Peter (I've forgotten his surname) and mentioned this incident. He stated he had seen this aircraft crash site; he was aged ten or eleven at the time. A photo was taken and published in a local newspaper, his father saw this photo and Peter was given a hiding for playing truant.

On returning to the Bexley Local Studies Centre I searched and found the attached photo, which was published in the Sidcup Times on 25th October 1940.

Around this time I bought a copy of "Kent at War" by Bob Ogley, and on page 79 is printed the same photo, but adding the fact that the plane was shot down by Pilot Officer Bryan Draper of 74 Squadron.

# *Mischievous Common Kids*

*Colin Weightman*



*Colin and his mate Ken Daws aged eight.*

Nearly every day as a boy I walked across Winn's Common, going down and back up through Bowman's Wood to and fro Wickham Lane School. Each journey was an adventure that I looked forward to every single trip.

Crossing Winn's Common I could see the houses in the distance that overlooked it. They were very old Victorian residences. I thought of how lucky the folk were to live right on the Common. My old primary school Headmaster, Mr Bull, lived in one of these old houses situated on Grosmont Road.

At the very end of this road where it petered out into a grassy track stood a small lone Victorian gas lamppost. It lit the top of the track that descended into Bowman's Wood.

It used to cast a spooky light, especially during the cold winter evenings when I walked home from school in the darkening light. It used to give me the shudders as a young kid, to be in this lonely place walking in its flickering, dancing and shadowy-pale gas light.

I am ashamed to admit that, as youngsters, we used to throw stones at it during the day and smash some of the glass panels out of it. It seemed such an inviting target for us common kids, just too good to ignore. They would keep replacing the glass, for us kids to do it yet again.

I also remember watching the little old man who's job it was to come along and turn the lamp on or off. He had a short pole with a hook on the top that he used to pull a small chain lever inside the lamp housing, turning the gas on and off next to a small pilot flame that burnt all the time. He would turn the light off the next morning. He'd then cycle slowly back up the road on his old bike, holding onto his pole, to the next gas lamppost, wherever that was situated, I don't know.

I must say that as kids we did get up to mischief, yet we did not deliberately intend to cause any annoyance or to get into really bad trouble. We just did these stupid things as adventurous youngsters often did. But I am genuinely sorry in so many ways for some of the 'vandalous' things we did as kids, back in those far off days, where we all roamed free playing outdoors all day long.

# *More Tales From Yesteryear*

*John Miles*

After leaving Bostall Lane School I went on to Wickham Lane School. After school we would raid the local cake shop and get a bag of stale cakes to eat on the way home. Sometimes I would get a haircut at Mr Pimms; he looked like Capt. Mainwaring (pronounced Mannering) from Dad's Army and had not a hair on his head, but he had some magic lotion that he made and the last time I saw him he had ginger hair sprouting out the top of his head.

The local ice cream maker was Mokes' Cornflower Ice Cream, at Wickham Lane; they used to cycle all around the Abbey Wood and Plumstead areas.

While at Wickham Lane I was picked to sing in the London Schools Choir, made up from London schools. We practised I think at Conway Road School. The concert was held at The Woolwich Tabernacle, Beresford Square.

The Headmaster was Mr Wale. He had one arm and one leg owing to injuries received in WWI. In spite of this he still managed to cane. Another teacher was Mr Hack, very appropriately named. There was Mr Griffin who was a very good teacher and a very fair man. After the death of his first wife, Mr Wale married my cousin Betty, who was the local Girl Guide leader.

We would go collecting conkers in Plumstead Cemetery at Fanny on the Hill until we were caught coming out of the main gate; why we came out the main gate I don't know, as we had climbed the wall at the back to get in.

My sister Joan, four years older than me, went to Church Manorway School. She worked at Cuffs in Powis Street later. When I left school I worked at the RACS in Powis Street. There was a dentist in Powis Street by the name of Moss. I read somewhere that his son was none other than the great racing driver, Stirling Moss.

My father also worked for the RACS at the Links, Plumstead Common, for many years, serving his time in the army during the war years and then going back after the war.

One time, during work at the Co-op in Powis Street, I was up on the roof to watch the fly past over Buckingham Palace. I saw two of the planes collide. One crashed into the Arsenal. It all seemed to happen in a flash and to this day I wondered if I had imagined it!

*\*See story: Aeroplane Crash Over Plumstead.*

Most of my family have been connected to either the Co-op or the Arsenal over the years. My mother Ivy worked in the Arsenal during the war on munitions. My grandfather, Julius Breuer, was an army man who finished his working life at the Royal Dockyard Woolwich, after returning from St Helena, where the Zulus were exiled after the Zulu war.

My mother also worked at the Royal Artillery Barracks tailoring for the Army. This was during the Army recruitment years. She used to tell us how the new recruits would line up for hours, in all weathers, waiting for their uniforms.



*Plumstead Common Road, The Links shops in the early 1950's. Note the Police Box.*

John Sullivan, an uncle, was a tug skipper and worked for Mitchell's on the Thames. He also only had one leg, which he lost when his tug capsized and was lucky to escape with his life. I also used to go to Charlton Football Club. My sister was involved in the social club and disco



dances. Although not an ardent supporter, I did go quite a few times, and also to their social club. It was at this time that I got TB, for the second time, and all the Charlton team signed a team photo for me. I am sorry to say that I have not got it any more as I gave it to a young boy who was less fortunate in life. This happened at the time that Sam Bartram was their goalkeeper.

*Tug Station Woolwich. Watercolour by William Barnes.*

I worked in the Powis Street Co-op, down in the basement, with the pots and pans. One day at the shop I meet Mr Morrison the MP and carried his goods for him to his car parked in Hare Street. I can't remember if I got a tip or not, but by the look of his car I don't think he could have afforded it. I also worked at other branches, including the Lakedale Road branch.

My father and I used to cycle from Belvedere to work, in all weathers, about five miles each way. Later I bought a Vincent Firefly motor to fit to my bike from a shop in Plumstead High Street. It was a wonderful little machine; in fact I still have one today. Latter on I passed it on to my dad, who rode it for many years, as I went on to bigger things.

It was on my journey to work one day that I witnessed an unfortunate accident. A horse and cart, whilst delivering to the school in Elmley Street, had the horse bolt and go through the fence above Plumstead Station and down onto the railway line. This was not the first horse that I had seen bolt, usually frightened by a tram.

# *Mr Raymond Weeks Who Was Evacuated*

By Serene from Dover Road C.P. School and

## *on behalf of Raymond Weeks*

Raymond originally lived at 57 Barnfield Road, Plumstead. He lived with his parents and five brothers and four sisters. "Like thousands of other children at the beginning of September 1939, two days prior to the declaration of war, on the 3rd September, we were evacuated. I was only nine when I was evacuated, like most of the children, to Hawkhurst.

We went from home, in Plumstead, to Plum Lane School, then by train to Waterloo and then to Hawkhurst. I came home from Hawkhurst after about three months (just before Christmas).

In June 1940 I was evacuated again, to Torquay in Devon. After about another month I came home again. Then the blitz started in 1940. On the 26th of September 1940 I was again evacuated; to Ilfracombe in Devon with one of my sisters. Like all children, I started writing letters to my mum and dad but we were not getting any answers from them.

After about two months my sister and I were called over to the Headmistress, who had to tell us that our house had been bombed on the 5th of October 1940 and that our mother, father, two brothers, two sisters and my brother-in-law had been killed that night.

From that day on I officially became an orphan; after that all happened my sister Pearl (who is now Pearl Tappenden) and I stayed with our aunt Dorothy Alldis, until April 1942, when we both came home from Ilfracombe.

We went to live with my aunt and uncle, in Eltham, South East London and stayed there for the remainder of the war, and until I got married in March 1955."

*Editors footnote: Photo was added to original story.*

*WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at [bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](http://bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar)'*



## *Mrs Ruby Gillespie, aged 88 Reminiscences*

Mrs Gillespie remembers coming up to the Common with her 'gang' from Ann Street, where she lived, to play in The Hollow. They took bottles of water and sandwiches, sometimes calling in at Alderton's bakery in Waverley Crescent to get stale buns for a penny. 'We made our own fun... I loved my childhood.'

'From where I lived at the top of Ann Street was Day's the butchers, then Chapman's fish shop. Crossing over the road to go up Park Street [now Waverley Road] you passed Dick's ice cream shop on the corner, then another fish shop we called Hole in the Wall. Going up towards the Common you came to Alderton's the bakery. Up a bit further was a large drapery stores called Draper Bros. where I used to buy my cotton stockings 4 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d a pair. Crossing over to the right was a long path going to the Co-op stores. You passed a little toilet on the way with all evergreens surrounding it. That was one way to the Common. In between that path was another path called John's Passage, which led you to the Tennis Courts and the house belonging to the Head Keeper.

Another way was up Vicarage Road leading to St Margaret's Terrace, where St Margaret's Church stood. Opposite there was the Territorial's 'Oaklands.' Going up from there you came near the Bandstand.



*Bandstand, Plumstead Common and St Margaret's church, c1905. Photo: Greenwich Heritage Centre.*



Going up further you came on to the Globe Picture House and a nice sweet shop next door. Crossing over the road was Plum Lane, leading you to Eaglesfield Fire Station and the fields where we used to take a picnic and pick bluebells.

*Eaglesfield Park, Shooters Hill.*

Another way from my house was up Roydene Road. When you came to the Ravine we used to go down a lot of steps, and there was a lake. St Mark's Church was further along the road. After passing The Ship public house there was a large green opposite where cricket was played. The other side of that green was a road leading to King's Highway.

Round the corner from where I lived were the shops. Home and Colonial, Post Office, Werner's the bakery and grocery store. Across the road was Goldsmith's the greengrocer, then a tiny little shop called The Bonnet Box, a hat shop. Up the road from there was the Rose Inn public house, Cassell's the chemist, Basset's, a little grocer store, where we used to buy a pennyworth of pickles or jam or broken biscuits, and a launderette.'



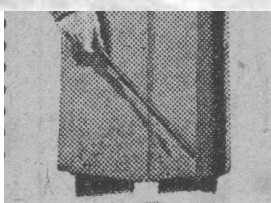
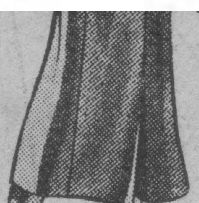
This is my grandm  
 her being mischievo  
 115



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