

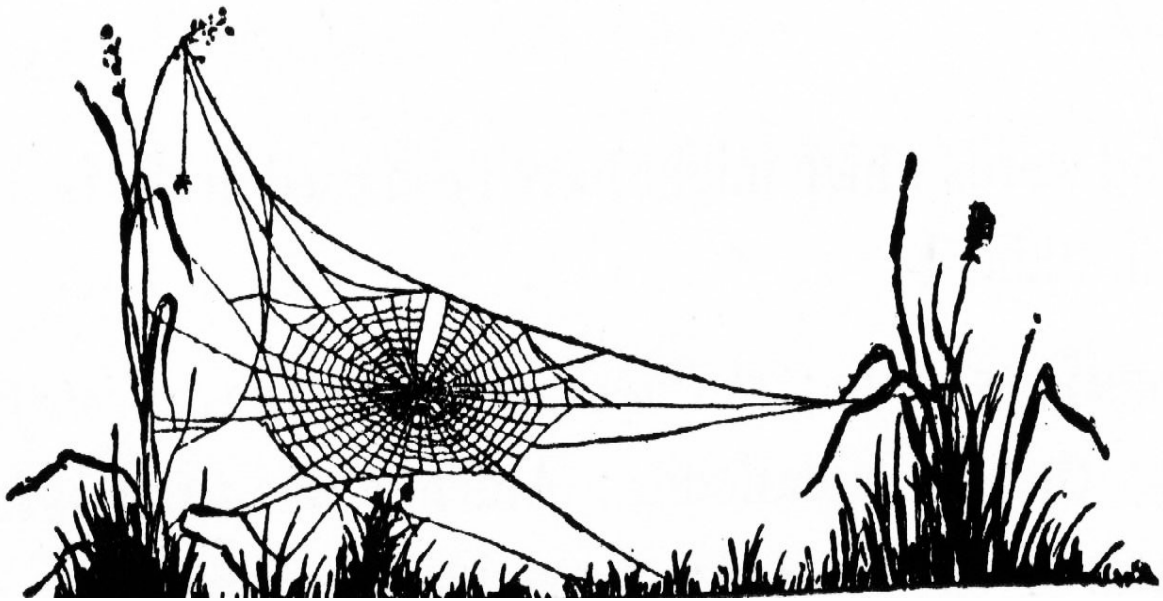
*Common  
Folk*



# *Common Folk*

**Vol. 2**

**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 spaces. Where folk, especially in spring and summer, still enjoy the shady trees and the grassy banks and enjoy the wintry 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 in so 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.

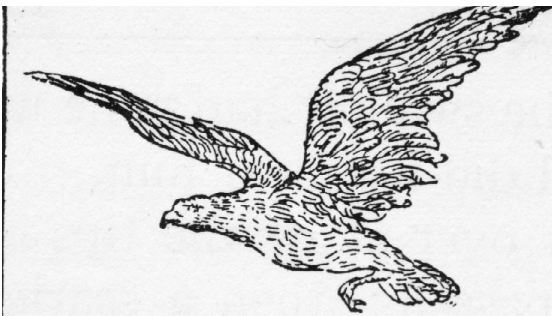
Also, you will notice there are often repeated themes in many of the stories in the book. Despite this repetitiveness, I chose to keep these stories, as they were originally told, because I feel that each story is a little piece of social history, told as it was remembered and as it was lived by these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

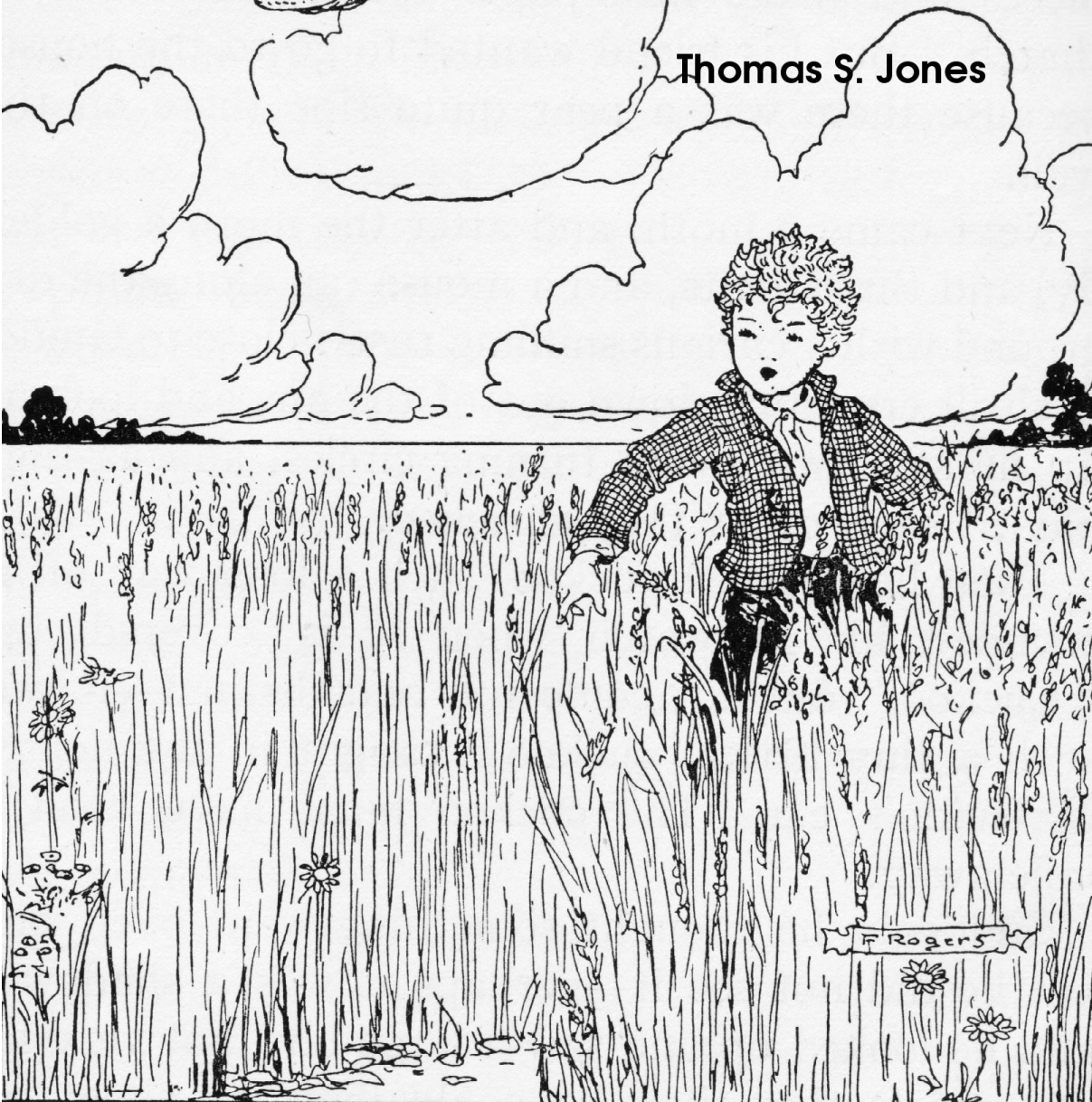


Across the fields of yesterday  
He sometimes came to me,  
A little lad just back from play,  
The lad I used to be.



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 and often 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 daily 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.

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; your playmates, your schoolmates or 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 along 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.*

# *My Early Life In Hudson Road Plumstead.*

*Lynda Ryan (nee Wright)*

Wednesday 3.10.1945, my birthday, Born in British Home for Mothers and Babies, Woolwich, London, SE18. I don't remember any of it; my earliest fleeting memory is sitting in a high carriage-style pram, outside our house, which was 29 Hudson Road, Plumstead. I must have been about 12 months old, staring across at another baby, the boy next door, Geoffrey Welch, our mums used to put us out "to get the air" and probably to keep us amused by staring at each other over the fence, over the pram handle. We lived in a rented terraced house on one of the hills that led up to Plumstead Common. Our road eventually came out to St Margaret's Church, now demolished, more's the pity.



My next recollection is as a toddler, I must have been about 3 years old, and my sister Heather and I had been taken to the house of Heather's godparents, uncle Charlie and aunt Edie, who lived in the top half of the house at 51 Crescent Road. I was dressed in a coat and hat trimmed with velvet, and wore little fur gloves, lovingly referred to as 'Bunny Gubs'. There was a panic because I fell up the steps to the garden and split my chin open, no problem, it healed without stitches. Uncle Charlie (later uncle Chas) had a Sunbeam motorbike and sidecar, in which we had many merry outings. Heather and I were passengers in the sidecar when we went on holiday to Boscombe, Bournemouth. Later on, he bought his first car, a black Morris Minor, registration LFC 120, and Heather and I would go round to the house of a weekend and "clean" the car, though I can't remember doing a very good job on it.

Our house in Hudson Road was a typical terraced house, with a small patch of garden at the front, enclosed by a privet hedge and originally an iron gate and railings, which disappeared during WWII to be melted down for the war effort. Dad used to grow Gladioli and Dahlias in the front garden. The front door opened to a narrow passage off which opened a front

room, the parlour, known to us as the front room, was only used for celebrations like Christmas, weddings, funerals, and for courting, until dad knocked on the bedroom floor, which signalled 'time to go home'. The fire was only lit in the front room on extra special occasions, such as Christmas. I loved that room and its mysteriousness, always half in the dark, on account of the semi-drawn curtains, whether to keep out the sun or to keep out the prying eyes of the neighbours. The furniture I remember in the front room was a heavy leatherette three-piece suite, of a settee and two armchairs, with a stamped logo on the back cushions of some celebration, possibly Queen Victoria's jubilee, or some such event. On either side of the fireplace in the two alcoves were cupboards, which came halfway up each side. I used to love opening them, and can still smell the musty smell now; we used to keep our Christmas decorations in there, in an old cardboard box, which we added to each year, and which we used to get out with great excitement every Christmas to deck the pine tree, brought home by dad, and planted in a pot of earth from the back garden. The needles used to drop relentlessly, but there was nothing better. Until I was about nine or ten, we used to clip little metal holders onto the branches and put little wax candles in them, a bit dangerous, but I can't ever remember them being lit up. That was when we still had gas lighting, two gas lights on the chimneybreast, in both the front room and the middle room, I can't remember a gaslight in the passageways. The gas meter was in the coalhole under the stairs, where we kept a shovel to load the bucket to stoke up the fire. We learnt how to put a sixpenny piece into the gas meter to keep the gaslights popping and spluttering. Mum used to tell us how her dad would punish them for misbehaving with a spell in the coalhole. One spot of misbehaving was sliding down the banisters of the stairs, which was very short, but very tempting; our auntie Ivy broke her arm doing it, and probably got the coalhole as punishment.

When we got wired up with the electric lights, we had another meter in the coal hole, this time an electric meter, swallowing florins (two shilling pieces).

Further up the passage, at the level of the first stair, was the 'middle kitchen', which was our living room, originally containing a gas stove, a square "utility" table for dining, and four upright chairs. Also a fireplace with a fender and two 'fender boxes' to put paper and firewood for the fire, the lids had padded seats, where my sister Heather and I would sit, getting roasted down one side till our cheeks were red, and from where we would toast rounds of bread for Sunday tea, to go with the cockles and winkles bought from the winkle man when he came round our street with his cart. Dad loved these for Sunday tea, occasionally with little pink shrimps and a large Spanish onion, which he relished. Afterwards we'd have jelly and pink blancmange while listening to the wireless, perhaps to an episode of 'Journey into Space', with mum sitting in the large wood framed armchair, knitting our school jumpers.

At the end of the passage was the 'back kitchen': In one corner was a green and cream kitchen cabinet with a pull down enamel working surface. In another corner was a large walk-in larder, which backed on to the coal cellar. In the far corner was a kitchen sink with a cold water tap; the alcove on the other side of the fireplace contained a gas cooker that had ornate cast iron legs (under which the cat had kittens). In this very basic kitchen mum cooked up the most amazing meals, and we still recall Sunday mornings: we always got up late, had a late breakfast of egg, bacon, tomatoes, bread and butter and a cuppa, With 'Forces

Favourites' on the radio (Jean Metcalfe and Cliff Michelmores), and after the washing up in the enamel bowl with hot water from the kettle on the cooker, mum would start to prepare the Sunday roast, with roast beef, roast potatoes and other vegetables. We'd help by chopping up the mint leaves for the mint sauce, to go with the roast lamb or mutton. Dad would dig up and grate a horseradish root for horseradish sauce to go with the roast beef. We would help Mum make a cake mix for fairy cakes for Sunday tea, to eat after the shrimps and winkles. Just behind the kitchen was the scullery, situated out the back door, up the path. It contained an old copper boiler with a wood fire underneath, where the washing used to be boiled on washday, usually on Mondays. Lunch then was shepherd's pie made from the leftovers of the cold roast on Sunday. Beside the copper stood an old cast-iron mangle, with two large wooden rollers, which creaked away on washing day. The scullery was also regarded as dad's workshop, where he potted about, doing his bits of woodwork and where he kept his tins of paint on shelves. Two other important tasks undertaken in the scullery were the preparation of the chicken feed and the mending of our shoes, for which dad kept a whole range of cast iron 'lasts' from the smallest to the largest size. We used to love watching him cut and form a new leather sole or heel, banging in the little pins and shaping the edges. That was workmanship.

## Bath Time



We didn't have a bathroom, so every day we would use the back kitchen sink for a 'bits' wash, an all over wash. Bath night was Friday night, when mum would heat up the back kitchen by lighting the gas oven, heating the water in an enamel bucket and saucepans over the gas rings. Dad would be charged with bringing in the galvanized metal bath, which hung outside the kitchen door. A 'Reckitt's' lavender bath cube was dropped into the water and then more water was added until the correct temperature was reached. The order of the bath was always me first, being the youngest, then Heather, then mum. Dad always got the murky water last, topped up with another kettle of hot water.

Wrapped up in hot fluffy bath towels we would all gather in the middle kitchen and put on our flannelette pyjamas, then sit beside the fire on the fender-boxes, drinking cocoa or Bournvita and listening to 'Friday Night is Music Night', and 'This is Henry Hall' on the wireless.

The back garden behind the house had a long patch of grass we called 'The Lawn', with borders where dad grew Dahlias and Chrysanthemums, a gooseberry bush and rhubarb patch. At the end of the garden was situated the chicken shed and rabbit hutches. The feed for the chickens was prepared in a big enamel bucket, into which was mixed potato peelings and bran, I can smell it now. The chickens were good layers, we were never short of eggs,

but we weren't good at killing and eating the chickens, or the rabbits either.

Behind the scullery was the outhouse, the 'smallest room', a brick built toilet, which flushed with a pull chain. A wooden seat stretched between the two side walls and on one was a nail from which hung the toilet paper, usually the Daily Mirror, torn into squares, threaded on a string. It was a useful job when sitting there to tear up more paper into little squares. That was before the days of Ibcot toilet rolls. The toilet door had a six-inch gap at the bottom and top, which let in the winter wind and rain. Dad boarded over the top gap, but not to keep the rain out: Heather and I used to hang our dartboard on the toilet door, and our aim was not always too good!

### **Play Time**

It was safe to play out in the street in the 1950's, and we would sit around on the kerb with the other neighbours' kids. Geoffrey from number 27, Hilary and Barry Burbridge from 35, Theresa Fee from 31 (very shy), and our cousins, the Riley's, Brian, Peter, Alan and Julia, from number 37. We used to sit and play marbles, or dig out the moss from between the paving slabs and make little moss gardens. We would play hopscotch, or ball, sometimes we would lose the ball down the drain gully hole beside the kerb, and would have to lift off the heavy cast iron grill and hang one of the boys upside down by his ankles to retrieve it. Sometimes the big tanker lorry would come along and clean out the drains with a long tube, making a lot of noise and a big smell.

'What's the time Mr Wolf?' was probably one of the safest games we played. The most daring was 'Knock Down Ginger', where we would vote the speediest boy to knock on somebody's door then run away and hide, not always successfully! The elderly neighbours all thought we were right tearaways.

Dad used to work at AJS and Matchless motorbike factory down in Plumstead, and we often used to run down the hill after school to meet him coming home from work. There was a Chemist shop on the corner, opposite the factory: I can remember the smell of that chemist shop now. Dad used to swing me up onto his shoulders for the walk home, a 'flying angel' we used to call them. (I was a notoriously poor walker when I could cadge a lift on dad's shoulders). Dad would come home, go to the 'back kitchen', have a wash in the enamel bowl in the sink, then sit down in the 'middle kitchen' to eat his evening meal. Sometimes I would climb up on his lap and look longingly at the fork-fulls going into his mouth and, if I was lucky, he would give me the tastiest titbit from his steak and kidney pud, or liver and bacon or, best of all, mum's 'roly poly' bacon and onion steamed pudding with spring greens.

### **Christmas Time**

Dad bought a set of new electric fairy lights for the Christmas tree, a string of coloured light bulbs, from the electric shop down the road owned by the Anderson's, (we went to school with Gerald and Hazel) we used to take our wireless battery (accumulator) to this electric shop to be re-charged. The electric fairy lights were probably more dangerous than the candles as we used to string the cable up and plug it into a two-way switch in the electric light socket. What a welcoming sight, coming home in the dark on a snowy December evening and seeing the tree lit up with all the coloured lights in the front window.

Every year, around Christmas time, dad would get bits and pieces from the motorbike factory, such as bike springs and the like, and fashion a new poker for mum for the fire. The

fire always seemed to be mum's domain, and Heather and I soon learnt how to set the paper and wood in the fire place in readiness for lighting the fire when we got home from school.



*Earl Rise School 1949-50. I am 2nd row from top, 3rd from left, between Michael Sherwood and Carol Wilson. 1st Row top: left to right: Joseph (?), Michael Bush, Patsy Menzies, Maureen Willcox, John Hollingsworth, Gerald Anderson, Jackie Bassett, and teacher Miss Stenton (? Denton).*

We didn't have a television, but uncle Chas did, and so when the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II was held, we all went to Chas and Edie's place to watch. It was a whole day event, and everyone got togged up in his or her Sunday best. Heather and I wore green tartan taffeta frocks with dark green velvet trim, and had a thoroughly magical day.

Christmases' and 'occasions' were spent in this way: In the evening the grown ups sat round and played cards games such as 'Newmarket' and 'Rummy', and then we watched the very scary TV serial 'Quatermass' on the telly, though I watched most of it from behind the settee, with my head buried in a cushion.

Later, all the houses in Hudson Road including the surrounding area were demolished and the area was rebuilt as a council estate.

Just about every garden in our street still had a corrugate iron Anderson Shelter at the end, used for shelter from bomb raids during the war. Most of them sat on the surface, but the one at number 27 next door was still half-buried under a mound of grass.

At the back of our garden and that of number 31 was a huge elm tree, which grew in the garden of the house in Pattison Road, which backed on to us. Wood pigeons nested in this great elm tree. One year, about 1957 or 58, there was a huge storm and a massive branch fell off the tree into our garden, knocking down our wooden clothes line post and killing Nelson, our one-eyed tortoise.

## Bed Time

Heather and I shared the small bedroom at the top of the stairs, which we always called 'the back bedroom'. We both slept in a small double bed with a wooden bed-head, upon which we used to stick our 'stamps', coloured prayer stamps which they used to hand out whenever we attended Sunday School or 'Friday night meetings' at Richmond Hall, down the road. Our bedroom did not have gas or electric light, so we were trusted with a candle in an enamel candleholder and with matches. Geoffrey Welch, next door, slept in the corresponding bedroom next door, so we used to lift up a picture on our wall (entitled 'Jesus suffers little children to come unto him,' which I won in a Scripture competition) and we would tap out 'Morse code' with a suitably hard object, sending him not very interesting messages.

To contact our mates Hilary and Barry up the road at number 35 we had to slide up the sash window and whistle, or make impressions of owl hoots; failing that, we would shout "Can you hear me?" (until mum would shout at us to get back into bed.) Because our house didn't have an indoor toilet we had to use an enamel potty ('The Po') at night, which was kept under our bed.

The middle bedroom upstairs was occupied by our uncle George, mum's brother, who had been in the army during the war and brought back exotic souvenirs from the places he had been stationed. When he remarried he moved out to Peckham, and Heather got her own bedroom, and I stayed in the back bedroom.

The upstairs front bedroom was where mum and dad slept: if we were unwell, we used to sleep next to their bed, in the 'bed-chair,' a wooden armchair with hinges that ingeniously unfolded into a little bed. We spent many sick days in it, with measles, chicken pox, mumps, etc. sitting up in the bed-chair, playing post offices, or reading.

When we were ill, mum sometimes needed to call the doctor. Our doctors' surgery was at that time one of the only all-women practices in the district, possibly the first. Doctors Eileen Wise and Eileen Gorman in Burrage Road set it up. They had also been very involved in the establishment of The British Home for Mothers and Babies in Woolwich. They were always compassionate and dedicated doctors who cared much for the people in their community. Mum remembers Doctor Gorman, when she was a newly qualified doctor, who would always come out even if a



*Lynda, aged 15, outside 29 Hudson Road in 1960.*

person couldn't afford to pay (before the good old days of NHS). Dr Gorman visited us through all our childhood ailments and quite a few serious ones too. I had pneumonia once and another time hepatitis. She was my doctor up until the 1970's, when I moved away from Hudson Road. She was at my birth and when I married she was at my baby's birth, more than 20 to 25 years ago. (2008)



# *My Early Years In Plumstead*

*Diane Hagan nee Plater and brother Alan Plater*

Diane recalls

Money was tight in those days but life was good. I lived in Glyndon Road with my parents,



Lily and Albert Plater and my brothers Alan and John. All my Mother's side of the family lived nearby, with the exception of two aunts, Em and Ethel, who lived in Eltham and one uncle, George, who lived just across the Thames. Fred and Kitty Vinton lived in Ann Street with my cousins, Barbara and Pat, my gran, Flo Vinton, lived in Ancona Road with my aunt Doris and uncle Chris and their son Keith. My uncle, Alf Vinton and his wife Doris, lived with their daughter Linda in Glyndon Road, on the corner.

In those days we all made our own entertainment and I remember some great parties. My dad used to sing his party pieces, such as, 'Oh, oh Antonio and 'One finger, one thumb keep moving'.

*Diane at Earl Rise Primary School 1951.*

I attended Earl Rise School, which I believe still exists, from 1950 for three or four years, until my family moved to Folkestone. I can remember on my very first day at school when an older boy fell down whilst climbing up a drain pipe. He gave me a thump because I laughed, which was quite a reality check about school life, I guess I'd got used to having two long-suffering older brothers, Alan and John, who did not retaliate if I annoyed them, both wonderful brothers who now live in Australia and New Zealand with their respective families.



*Mum and dad (Albert), possibly in Ancona Road.*

I remember the Vicar; I think his name was Rev Milman, or something similar. My father regularly attended his church and at Christmas time the Vicar would call round for a cup of tea. He obviously loved my Mother's mince pies (no, I don't mean cockney rhyming slang!) whenever my mother passed him the plate he used to take two, really funny the things that stick in

one's mind. I had to go to Sunday School every week, as I think most children did in those days. I still have the Bible I received as a prize for regular attendance

My dad had a brother in Canada who used to send us food parcels after the war. What excitement and anticipation we all felt when these were unpacked. So many things were in short supply in England for a few years after the war ended. Sweets were on ration for quite a time after the end of WW11. The highlight of our week was Fridays, when we went to the sweet shop on the corner of Glyndon Road to buy our two ounces, which was one week's ration, I think.

My father decided to start keeping chickens and I can remember one hot summer's day John and myself having to go to Plumstead station to collect them. We had to struggle home to Glyndon Rd with this huge wicker hamper that the chickens were in, it's a wonder the poor things survived the journey. My father could never bring himself to kill one though and used to get Tom Barthorpe, our neighbour, to do it for him.

One evening my brother John was duly despatched to the corner shop to buy some boot polish and some thugs beat him up and took the money, even then there were muggers about (some things never change!)

There was a bombed-out church nearby and I can remember us all playing in the ruins, strictly out of bounds of course! Happy days indeed and a stark contrast to life in this day and age.

One incident I recall took place on a lovely summer's day on a family outing to Danson Park. I was about three or four at the time. My brother John was bending over looking into a pond examining something of interest. For some reason I felt an urge to push him into the pond. So, on this mischievous impulse, I actually did this. Poor John went headlong straight into the water, much to my parents' horror! Fortunately the water wasn't deep. On that same day



Alan was exploring a nearby field and came across an irresistible combination, a brick and a fresh cowpat! As you may well have guessed, he hurled the brick into the cowpat with the predictable outcome. So there was Alan covered head to foot in green smelly cow pat poo and brother John wet and muddy from his dunking. Mum and dad temporarily disowned them both and they made their way home on the other side of the road. What little horrors we kids were but what simple fun we had in those days.

*(Left) My grandparents, Bill and Flo Vinton, with four of their nine children, Ethel and George at the back and Alf and Fred standing at the front and on my gran's lap. Henry and Flo's five other children were William, who was killed in WWI, Emily, Lily and Doris, another little girl, Violet, unfortunately died in infancy. Still surviving is Doris who now lives in Eltham and Fred who now lives in Bexleyheath and is 93. (2009)*

I remember very well the terrible Smogs we used to get in Plumstead, swirling green grey choking fumes. The Smogs were the main reason my family moved away to Folkestone in late

1953/early '54. My mother had to have open-heart surgery which was obviously a pioneering procedure in those days, on a doctor's advice we moved to the coast so she could recuperate. I can still remember how homesick for Plumstead I was though and I cried for weeks afterwards because I missed my friends at Earl Rise school and of course my gran, my aunts and my uncles and cousins!

I have some lovely memories of Plumstead, I was so lucky to have a happy childhood, not much money about in those days but all my aunts, uncles and cousins lived within a few streets of my home in Glyndon Road so there really were some great family parties and wonderful times together.

**Alan Plater, Diane's brother, who now lives in Paraparaumu, in New Zealand, also recalls some childhood memories of living in Plumstead.**

Plumstead was my mother's family home, from 1944 to 1954, after my father returned home from service overseas in the Army. Mum's family name was Vinton and we had numerous relatives in Plumstead and Eltham.

We lived in a little terraced house in Glyndon Road. I was seven or eight when we moved there and John my brother two years younger. We attended Conway Road School in those early years until the 11+. John went to Plum Lane School after that and I managed to get to Shooters Hill Grammar School.



*Mum, Lily, and my two brothers, Alan and John, c1942.*

Happy childhood days.

In 1945 my sister Diane was born. I remember the air raid shelter in the back garden. The barrage balloons and anti aircraft fire when the doodle bugs attacked. I remember the street parties after the war with bunting and long trestle tables up the centre of the street. I remember playing on a bombed building site and some kid throwing a brick at me. Masses of blood and several stitches at St Nicholas Hospital.. I remember the long summer holidays when we would spend every available moment on Plumstead Common playing cricket or Cowboys and Indians in the ravine, which doubled as a Western landscape. In the winter playing football and tobogganing when the snow fell on the Common on a rather precipitous slope on King's Highway on an old rusty roofing iron. We must have led charmed lives.

I recall as children, visits to Lords Cricket Ground to see the famous Australian side of 1948, including the great Don Bradman. Then John and I would make our own way around London, visiting various museums and exhibitions and the Festival of Britain in 1951. We went to the Saturday morning cinema in Plumstead, Roy Rogers and Flash Gordon, also swimming at the Plumstead Baths.

In the early days at secondary school I caught a tram to Beresford Square and then changed trams to go to Woolwich Common. Then I would walk up Red Lion Lane to school, past the Military Academy. I remember at the tram stop there was an eel shop and watching, quite fascinated, the eels being chopped up alive. The morbid curiosity of small boys! As I got older I walked the whole distance to school.

I also have recollections of violin lessons, somewhere off the Common. My dad working at the Arsenal as a Civil Servant. Mum being very ill and me having to do housework. Visits to Danson Park or to Abbey Woods on Sundays for picnics. Summer holidays at Jaywick or at Cowes or Mundeford. Invariably it rained. Trips on the Woolwich Free Ferry. Paper rounds on snowy mornings. A baker's round with a horse and cart on Saturday mornings for the RACS, to earn a few bob.

Those were hard up but happy days. In material possessions we had nothing, but it didn't matter with so much love and laughter and a wonderful extended family. Happy memories indeed.



# *My Experience As A Child In WWII*

*Diane Francesca Smith (nee Jones)*

I grew up mostly in Plumstead. I was a boarder at the Notre Dame Convent in Eglinton Road. I was born in 1938 so was very young when the War started.

I remember sitting in our dormitory at the convent listening to the bombs falling but not knowing what the noises were. I asked the Sister in charge of us what was happening and she said, "Be quiet, and say your rosary. It is the devil and all his works." Consequently I had a very strange view of the Devil and the noise he made whilst going about his business of being evil.



*An underground shelter.*

We often had to go down into an air raid shelter, which was under the playground. There, if it was in the daytime, we would have makeshift lessons, all sitting on the ground with a blanket.

My father decided to take me away from the Convent because he felt that I was being brainwashed too much by the sisters. I went back home with mum at Plumstead Common. My brother was born in 1943 and I can remember us having to go down into the shelter at the bottom of the garden. It always puzzled me why, very often, I would wake in the night, standing in the living room with mum or dad putting my coat on over my pyjamas. It wasn't till much later I realised I had been lifted from my bed and carried downstairs when the air raid warning went off.

We would go out into the garden with dark skies overhead riven with searchlight beams and already the sound of bombs dropping, or later, the sound of the rockets and buzz bombs in the skies. I was very afraid of this and once I panicked and pushed my dad into the shelter and he cut his forehead on the corrugated metal round the doorway.

I remember one time when mum, my baby brother, and I spent about a week in the shelter. It seemed there were back-to-back raids day and night. Mum used to rush out to buy food, or get more water, or simply to sweep up the broken glass, left as a result of the blasts from the bombing nearby. We were near the Docks and the Royal Arsenal so were bound to get the overspill.

*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)

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# *My Memories*

*David Butler*

I was born December 8th 1941. My father told me I was brought home from The British Hospital for Mothers and Babies, Samuel Street, Woolwich, on a tram. I was nearly four years old when the war ended and don't remember much about it. I remember being in the garden, at 80 Southport Road, looking up and seeing many large aeroplanes flying overhead. From memory they were going south-east and clearly visible. They were bombers, as they had straight wings, were very high and flew in formation. I remember little puffs of smoke from the anti-aircraft guns, appearing high in the sky, towards the river Thames, a mile or so from where we lived. I remember the 'Dug Out', the air raid shelter, at the top of my auntie Maud's garden at 78 Southport Rd. Aunt Maud, my father's elder sister, had the shelter where my father carried me when there were air raids. I remember dad and uncle Jack taking it down after the war; a deep hole was left. I remember barrage balloons on Plumstead Common. Ration books we used for sweets, up until the 1950s. I still have my buff coloured I.D. card.

When my mother was carrying me, she was evacuated to Scotland, to a farm where she enjoyed fresh milk, butter and cream. But she came back home to Plumstead, as it was too quiet. My brother Alan came home by taxi! (He was born in 1936 in Plumstead at St Nicholas' Hospital.)

Our house at 80 Southport Road was a two-bedroom terraced house with a little front garden. No bathroom in the house, but we had a proper bath, iron enamelled; not a galvanised tin bath, in the kitchen. It had a large wooden board on top covered with lino. The board hinged under the window and acted as a worktop for food preparation etc. Under the bath were kept shoe-cleaning materials. We had a gas Ascot water heater over the large clay 'Butler' sink for hot water to wash and to bath. Often, the lid was raised on the bath to reveal large black spiders in the bath. In a cupboard where the old cooking range was years before, mum had a large blue vase in which she kept soda crystals for the washing. 'Wash Day' was Monday, when mum used the large mangle and a glass ribbed scrubbing board. Mum suffered a lot from arthritis in her fingers later, probably from all the scrubbing.

A large cupboard under the stairs where coal and firewood was kept had a loose brick in the wall that I fancied dad kept secret hoards of money in. When I was about 16, dad allowed me to grind and polish a 9" diameter optical glass mirror for a telescope in this cupboard. I finished the mirror but did not have the skills to produce the parabolic shape needed. Dad and I set up a concrete pillar in the garden to mount the telescope and he got me a couple of old brake drums for a mirror cell. I learnt a lot about geometrical optics, as well as grinding and polishing glass. The glasses we used were two portholes from Chatham dockyard, for 10/- each; you needed two: one for the mirror; the other for the tool. The house was knocked down in the late 1960's. When we moved to their new home at 40b Walmer Terrace, mum cleaned our old house before we left; she did not want anybody to think she did not keep her house clean, which she always did.

A vivid memory I have is when uncle Jack, aunt Maude's husband, was having a bath one

Saturday night. I'd forgot he was having a bath and, wanting the toilet, I dashed out into the kitchen to see my uncle getting out of the bath. When he saw me he fell back into the bath, tipping it over on to its side, scattering uncle and all the bathwater over the kitchen floor. He was not pleased! Nor was my father. Only aunt Maud and mum saved me from their wrath.



It took a lot of effort to mop up all the water. They gave mum and dad a shilling for the gas now and again for the gas meter.

*Royal Engineers Woolwich 1900.*

Uncle Jack was in the Royal Engineers during WWI. He and auntie Maud were married about 1923. Their wedding photograph shows them in the back garden of 78 Southport Road with my father; uncle Bert, dad's younger brother; and aunt Nell, oldest sister to dad. They were probably married in the Baptist chapel, opposite our

house (it became East Plumstead Baptist). It was known as the 'Tin Chapel'. Uncle Jack was, I think, a draughtsman in his earlier days, then worked as a postman for a city firm. When I collected stamps he would bring back interesting stamps. I had a good collection of British Commonwealth stamps. My uncle was born in Colchester; his full name was Jack Naylor Lyland Trueman. I think he must have had some terrible experiences during WWI as he would cry sometimes when the war was mentioned or, strangely, when the French National Anthem was played. No one talked of it or about WWII when I was young.

I have happy memories of Guy Fawkes Night and Christmas as a child and teenager. We had a bonfire on Guy Fawkes. Friends and I would get fireworks, bangers and skyrockets mainly, weeks before, and let them off around the streets! I would light a banger and throw it up fizzing, a much bigger bang that way! Tu'penny bangers were devastating compared with penny ones. We made a Guy, stuffing newspaper into clothing.

As Christmas drew near presents would begin to appear on the sofa in the front room, where I was never allowed as a boy, except on special occasions. I would secretly inspect the packets, trying to guess what they were and for whom. As a teenager I'd buy the Christmas tree. One year I paid 7/6 for it, which was extravagant, mum said. I'd decorate it. We had lots of chicken, ham and Christmas pudding etc. Mum made mince pies and cakes. Aunt Maud and uncle Jack came round on Boxing Day evening for tea and the cards would come out with the sherry, sweets, nuts and fruit. They would argue over card mix-ups. New Year was similar: at midnight auntie would stand at her front door and ring a large school hand bell. We could hear the car horns and the ship foghorns down on the Thames. When the dustmen came round in the New Year, they were offered drinks of gin and other spirits.

Another incident firmly fixed in my memory was when I was about twelve years old. I read that diamond was the hardest of substances. This impressed me so much that I went upstairs to my parents' bedroom and through their dressing table drawers until I found my mother's diamond necklace. I took it down to the back door and with a hammer I hammered it on the stone doorstep. Being imitation diamonds, the 'diamonds' broke up! (They would have

broken up even if they had been real diamonds!) It then dawned on me the awful situation I was in. What happened later, I can't remember, probably just as well!

I was interested in science and chemistry. I did experiments with wire, made batteries, and a simple galvanometer, which worked fine.

We had a cold and draughty outside lavatory. Our back garden was about 50 feet long with a chicken shed and run across the top of the garden. Dad grew vegetables and flowers. Outside the back door, where we had bright red geraniums on the windowsill, was the yard paved with red bricks with patches of concrete, which looked very pretty in the summer. Mum, dad and I would sit on a bench there, with my auntie Maud and uncle Jack, drinking cups of tea. I could see and hear the swifts high in the sky above the houses.

Aunt Maud lived with her husband Jack (Trueman) I used to go to aunts a lot, to ask for bits of wood, bamboo canes, string and paper. She loved me dearly and always tried to help me. I learnt years later that they had a child but he died at birth. One morning, when I was in my teens, I was in her garden and she came out and said her son would have been 30 years old that day. Their house was not as well appointed as ours; I don't think they had as much money coming in as we did.



*Earl Rise Primary School Class, 1953. I am front row, fifth from right.*

Bread and milk in summer were delivered by horse-drawn cart. When the horse did something, dad or uncle Jack would rush out with a bucket and spade and pick it up for the roses. I played in the streets a lot with my friends. We played Cowboys and Indians mainly. We used to climb over bombsites and got very dusty. When the road mending went on it was a great time with a real steamroller rumbling down the road. We also liked to see the brewery horse and dray going to Woolwich, along Glyndon Road, to the Woolwich Arsenal Railway Station. The horses were very large and handsomely decorated with brasses and rosettes, the driver splendidly dressed in apron and bowler hat. There was a large laundry opposite our house. I remember there were bombsites at the top of Southport on the left and another at the junction with Glyndon Road. They were full of dust and the rubble of



destroyed homes, but we would happily play on them.

I remember the severe winter of 1947. Large heaps of snow piled along the pavements, lasted a long time, and there was a coal shortage. When the coal arrived it was wet and had a few stones in it; this made dad very angry. Dad had a fascination with radios. He studied electricity. Dad had a Pye radio that he, especially on Sunday mornings, took out of its case just to look at and dust it. He had a long wire aerial going up the garden to a tall pole.

Just before I started school, at Earl Rise Primary, I was seated on the crossbar of my father's bike. We had just got a bag of meal from the Co-op in Brewery Road for the chickens. He said, pointing to Earl Rise School, "That's the school you will start at". I wasn't very pleased about that! Every morning mum sat me on the living room table to wash and dress me. She was very keen that I didn't get 'in-growing' toenails, so my feet got careful and painful attention! She also cleaned out my ears, carefully, with a hairpin wrapped in a cloth. Our doctor was Dr Bush in Plumstead High Street. We had an open coal fire and a little electric fire that we toasted bread on. Mum was a good plain cook and steak and kidney pies, meat puddings, roast lamb and beef were regular meals. Dad liked winkles with vinegar, pepper and brown bread (Hovis). He kept chickens and rabbits. He would ring the neck of a chicken, cut its throat with a small silver coloured knife, which was kept very sharp, and then hang it over the drain to bleed. He would then pluck it; this caused feathers to fly all over the garden. I used to watch dad 'draw' the bird; out came eggs with no shells! Mum would roast the bird. I don't think he killed the rabbits but had them killed and skinned. He used to say there was no goodness in a rabbit, but we had rabbit pie often. My brother was five years older than me. We'd play hockey in the garden with two sticks and a stone.

Dad often took us on holiday to Sheringham in Norfolk. We went by train to Charing Cross and then by taxi, a very rare experience, to Liverpool Street Station. Then by steam train to Sheringham. Dad was stationed around there when he was in the RAF and enjoyed it there. We stayed at a small flint/brick house with the Grands, who were Salvation Army people. I remember the beautiful sandy beach and watching the crab fishing boats come in. I was about seven years old.



Earl Rise Primary School Football Team, 1952-53 season.  
I am sitting in front row, first on the right.

When aged about eight we used to go up Plumstead Common to play cricket. There were three of us, Alan, Mick Mizen and I. More than once I got hit on the head by the hard ball. My other mates, Victor Sturrock, who lived just round the corner in Glyndon Road; Billy Hankin, who lived in Glyndon Road; and others; played on the Common all day long. Whenever we were thirsty we knocked at any old door and asked for a drink of water, which was always given. We played at cowboys and Indians, inspired

by Saturday morning pictures at the Century, off Plumstead High Street. Further along, towards Plumstead Museum, was another cinema: the Plaza - a real fleapit of a place. The flash cinemas were the Odeon and the Granada, in Woolwich. Going to one of them seemed like a real palace; very plush, with red carpets, chandelier and gold gilt everywhere. Another aspect of my childhood, that turned out to be of the greatest importance, was being sent to Sunday School at East Plumstead Baptist Church in Griffin Road. I remember being taken by dad to the infants' class, at five years old. I was welcomed by Mrs Pucksley, a little lady who was a dear and loving Christian to us little ones. I was on the Cradle Roll. I can't remember anything about the infants' class except the pictures hanging on the wall of the Lord Jesus with children around Him. At about eight years old, I was in Mr Chapel's class of seven or eight boys. The hall was full with 60-70 children. We used the Sunday School Hymnery. There were verses, which we all had to read, and then Mr Logan, the Superintendent, read a response: a bit of liturgy!

I remember the annual outings to Littlehampton and the 'Socials'. The games were fun and at times a little risqué, with girls sitting on boys' laps momentarily! I attended the Bible Class with the other young people: David Cowing, Gordon Martin, Sylvia Basham, Hazel Jones, Evelyn Stonely and others.

Another great influence on my life was the Boy Scouts. I joined at 11 in 1952. I had been in the Cubs for about a year. Every Friday night from 6 till 10.00 was spent at Scouts, with the 12th Woolwich. Our uniforms were blue, which was unusual, with a yellow scarf and shorts. I got Tenderfoot, 2nd and 1st Class, about eight badges, Scout Cords (green cords with tassels) and the Bushman's thong. The Scouts was the main pleasure in my life. Every Friday night we ended with a game of 'Hand Ball'. I loved it and went home worn out, knuckles and knees bleeding and dirty. In the morning I sometimes got up late and feeling sick, due to the exertion of the night before. My mother would protest, saying I shouldn't go again, but dad would say, "Let 'im, he's all right." We went camping twice a year, Whitsun weekend and summer for a week (August). A large Pickford's furniture van was used to take us: kit, food and all the boys and scoutmasters. We camped on an apple farm in Meopham, Church Farm, Wood Borough in Wiltshire, near a canal and other places. Everything was so exciting: climbing trees, making wood fires, cooking,



*David Butler's school "Mug Shot", Plum Lane  
c.1955.*

chopping wood, making rafts on the canal, fishing using only a bent pin and a long stick. I caught thirteen fish and won the prize! We charged around, climbing trees, making bivouacs from branches and grass, and sleeping in them overnight. We would look out in the darkness and see the stars of the Milky Way, so brilliant. In the morning we found we had loads of gnat bites. There were camp-fires at the end of the day with singing, including:

'Ging Gang Gooly', 'In Dublin's Fair City', 'The National Anthem of the Ancient Britons', 'I'll sing you one O, green grow the rushes O' and many more. Boys with me then were David Cowing, Gordon Martin, Barry Beamish and many others I can't recall.

The influence was very spiritual. The Skipper (Mr Summers) was a Calvinist, as was Roy Leon. We had many talks on spiritual matters. I was converted at 17, at an evangelist meeting in our church. The preacher spoke about the blind Bartimeus. I was baptised by Mr Hallworth, the Minister at East Plumstead Baptist Church, in 1958. I joined the church and began to teach in the Sunday School, preaching at open-air meetings outside the Old Mill on the Common and at an old people's home on Plumstead Common. It wasn't until later that I felt a true conviction of sin, while I was with the Pentecostal. Neither mum nor dad showed any real interest in the Gospel. Sid Cook, a member at EP, started 'Youth for Christ' meetings in the area. I was involved in the fishing teams and was on the organising committee. We held evangelist meetings in a number of churches in Plumstead and Woolwich, once a month. We needed a treasurer for 'Youth for Christ' and Miss Maureen Fry, who attended All Saints, Herbert Road, was asked to take this on. She agreed. Before this I had gone to Woolwich to have a look round. Passing Cuffs Music shop, in Powis Street, I noticed a young lady with blonde hair, behind the counter. She was very pretty. I actually went in once or twice to get a closer look! This young shop assistant turned out to be the new treasurer for Youth for Christ! I lost no time in getting to know her. Eventually, in November 1963, we were engaged. We were married on July 31, 1965. We bought a house at 61 Nithdale Road for just under £3000. Our first child, Ruth, was born 15 December 1966 at St Nicholas Hospital.

Let me reminisce on my schooling and work. The children who went to Earl Rise School (Infants and Junior) were rather rough, as I remember. They were poor by comparison to me, I believe. I can remember children in very poor clothing and often there were purple marks on their lips and the back of their necks. I realised many years later it was because they had sores and boils, due mainly to a poor diet. The purple stains were from Iodine, which was used as an antiseptic. I never suffered from boils! The teachers there, I remember, were Miss Denton, an infant teacher, who, when she moved to Devon, we all cried over when she left; Mr Tolbot, a hard little man; and Mr Vaughan: mum liked him and felt he helped me a lot. My reading and writing were rather weak for years, so I did not make much progress in education. I was a rather naive and gullible sort of boy; the other boys seemed to be much harder. Consequently I was sometimes the butt of their teasing and kidding, but not bullying. I did not pass the eleven plus so I went to Plum Lane Secondary Modern School. I spent four reasonably happy and rather unproductive years there. Teachers I remember were, Mr Ben Kearns, a Scot, who taught me in the first two years; Mr Gilham the Headmaster; Mr Green, a big man who caned me and others many times for being cheeky; Mr Anderson: he was my teacher when I left school. The music teacher was Mr Shakespeare.

We had several school trips. The first I went on was the first time I had been away from home on my own. It was near the Dymchurch Railway. The site was an old army camp. We slept in large wooden huts: old barracks. I was very homesick.

The other school holiday was to Scotland at Kilmory Castle, on the west coast, for two weeks. I was about fourteen then. The second week a selected number of boys, me included, went to camp under canvas for about six days, on the islands known as the Garvelachs

(Islands of the Sea). This was very exciting. We roamed around the island, drawing and measuring it and so on. I think it was a sort of trial for the Duke of Edinburgh award that started shortly afterwards (1954/5). I was actually filmed holding a surveying pole, on top of a large rock. It was out on the BBC news. Somehow I managed to come 3rd in the exams, held at the end of term, for a number of years. I left school with no qualifications (O-levels), but very good references. I got a job as a junior laboratory technician at Red Lion Lane Grammar School near Shooter's Hill. The teachers I worked for were Mr Baily, Physics and Mr White 'Chalky,' Chemistry. My starting pay was £2/17s a week. I gave mum a pound, saved a pound and had 17/- to spend. I never knew such wealth! I had an account with the Westminster Bank. I was very nervous going into such an awesome place to cash a cheque. I started work early January 1957. I turned up at the school at about 8.00 am. on a frosty morning, to find the other technician, Mr McCabb, was not there. The School Secretary sent me up the road to where he lived. I found him to be an aged irascible Scot, most annoyed to be made to go to the school so early in the morning during the school holidays. I was shocked to see bottles of spirits on his sideboard. My main duties were to gather chemicals and physics apparatus together and put them on large wooden trays in preparation for the lesson. I learnt a lot doing this. I tried various pieces of physics equipment, and dabbled with chemicals, being interested in science, astronomy and chemistry.

I used to make telescopes out of lenses purchased for a few pence from a Mr Knight's shop near Woolwich Dockyard station, later in Plumstead High Street. His brother lived next door to us at 82 Southport Rd. He had a good range of microscopes, lenses and small telescopes and a lot of war surplus optics. I never had a proper telescope but made them up from spectacle lenses (1" diameter) and tubes made from rolled up magazines. An old music stand was used as a telescope stand. My brother bought me a Norton's Star Atlas, which taught me a lot (I still have it). It described telescopes that I could never hope to own. I spent many evenings out in the back garden with the Star Atlas and my homemade telescope. I saw my first comet; it was in April 1957, in the constellation of Andromeda, as recorded in my Star Atlas. I also used to collect and make chemicals at home. I did simple electrical experiments with batteries and made gunpowder! I made a galvanometer, an electro meter and an electrophorus. I had a book that had all the details to do everything a boy would want to do, if he had the ability; which I didn't.

When I started work I also went, for two and a half days a week, to South East London Technical College, Deptford, to study for the City and Guilds of London Institute certificate in Laboratory Technician's work. This certificate took around two years, and I passed. I went on and got the final certificate as well. I think we were the first to do the course. I used to travel by bus to Deptford and walk up Friendly Street to the college. This was a grand place to me. I bought a blazer with the badge of the college and a college scarf as well. One of the teachers there was a technician in the Chemistry Department at Imperial College, South Kensington. He told me there was a position for a technician in the Physics Department there. I was interviewed by professor D.J. McGee. I got the job and worked as an assistant to postgraduates doing their PhD's. While there I saw there were other technicians studying for degrees (General Physics). I decided that I must get a degree in physics. After I got the Final City and Guilds I went day release and night school at Woolwich Polytechnic to get three A Levels in Physics, Pure and Applied Maths. I also took O-level Chemistry without ever going

to a lecture; I learnt it all as a technician! So in 1964 I started my degree (BSc Special, Physics) at Woolwich Polytechnic. I did not find it easy! I graduated in 1967. The lecturers were of varying ability; Mr Fry (Maureen's father) and Mr Hyde were very good.

In early autumn, 1967 Maureen, baby Ruth and I moved to Devon. We lived at first in a company house (STC) at White Rock (Paignton), then in December we bought a house: White Acre, 6 Gillard Road, Brixham. Gillard Road is the road that leads up to Berry Head. We joined the Baptist Church there. Mr Arthur Neil was the pastor. It was in Brixham that I first went out preaching in a number of churches (Dartmouth and Stokefleming Congregational, Dartmouth Baptist, Moretonhampstead Baptist and others). I worked at STC, which is inland from Paignton. I worked on photo cathodes that are used in image intensifiers. After five years in Devon we moved to Chelmsford. Lydia and Nicola were born in Devon, Lydia in Torbay Hospital and Nicola in the Cottage Hospital at the bottom of Rea Barn, a steep hill in Brixham. On the Sunday morning of Lydia's birth (she was born about mid-day) I was preaching somewhere. It was then afternoon when I visited Maureen and first saw Lydia. Rebekah and Sarah were born in Chelmsford, in the maternity ward at St John's Hospital, Wood Street.

I joined EEV (Chelmsford) and continued work on photo cathodes till 1993 and then in the laboratory there until my retirement in December 2006. In 1985 I and others from EEV went to Ei, a large electronics company, outside the city of Nis in Yugoslavia, to begin a technological transfer of equipment and knowledge. This lasted till 1988. I spent about three to four months in Nis. It was a remarkable time, working with young men and women, all being university graduates. I was able to meet with Christians in the town. We stayed in a hotel in Niska Banja, a small village a few miles east of Nis. In 1985, on the initial visit, I was knocked down by a taxi in Belgrade and spent two nights in the hospital there. I suffered concussion, cuts and bruises and a very painful knee injury, which is still (2006) a bit stiff. In 1993 I was served with a notice of redundancy but was offered a position in the laboratories at English Electric. I have enjoyed my years there. I retire December 8th 2006 (God Willing).

Maureen and I joined Ebenezer Strict Baptist Church, Chelmsford, September 1973. I am (July 2006) the Sunday School Superintendent (commenced 1974) and a deacon (1976). Our daughters Ruth, Lydia, Nicola, Rebecca and Sarah must tell their own story. I continue preaching among Strict Baptist churches, UEC churches and Congregational churches as well as open air preaching in connection with the Essex Protestant Council.



# *My Years In Plumstead*

*Tony Pitcher*



*Tony aged one, 1936.*



*and on 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec.1937.*

My name is Anthony John Pitcher, my mates call me Tony.

I was born in The British Home for Mothers and Babies in Samuel Street, Woolwich on the 22nd of November 1935.

My parents, Albert Charles and Violet Maud Pitcher lived at No 5 Ravine Grove, Plumstead Common, my gran, grandpa and great grandfather lived next door at No 3 and on the other side at No 7 lived my auntie Nell and uncle Ted. My other grandparent's on my father's side lived in Maxey Road, Plumstead.

My father worked in the Abattoir at the top of Garland Road and my mother worked in Adelaide House overlooking London Bridge during the war.

Our house was the third house down from the Woodman Pub. Opposite the Woodman was the corner shop "Cookies". Along from the pub was the Ravine Cafe run by June Bloomfield and Sheila Cleary. All the bus drivers and clippies along with lorry drivers from all over such as Cuffs, Furlongs and lots of Saunders Haulage trucks would stop there every day for a cuppa or lunch. We as kids used to buy packets of Smiths Crisps with the salt in a little blue bag for tuppence in there.



*Auntie Doll, mum, nan, uncle Jack, uncle Bill and great grandfather 1914.*



*Nan, me, mum and Chum*

We always had a good look round the lorries and trucks that were parked there to see what we could find, our favourite was what we called the "gully 'ole cleaner" this was a large truck with a big tank and suction pipes which cleaned the drains in the streets as they usually had old balls which the cleaners found floating in the drains in the troughs on the side of the truck and we would of course take them to play with.

My best friends at the time were John Swanston, Denis Allen, Harry and Grace Capon, Peter Thynne and Harry Denton who lived either in my street or in Sutcliffe Road just round the corner.



*Grandparents on my dad's side at Maxey Road, back row; uncle Ernie and dad, middle row; gran and grandpa, front row; cousin Roy and me.*

Just across the main road at the top of our street was a big common where all us kids would play; it had an old lake down at the bottom that had been closed for years. The lake was divided into two halves and had a walkway across it with a little island in the middle. It had railings all round it and we had to climb over to get in and play. There was a tunnel at one end that you could walk up bent over if you were bold enough as it had a lot of water rats living in it, some kids ventured right up it's length which I believe went up to the Slade School.

There was also Winn's Common, which had a paddling pool and the football pitches. Plumstead Common had the cricket pitches and further on past the Old Mill there was a putting green where you could borrow a golf putter and ball from the man in a little box hut. There were tennis courts opposite. Bostall Woods was a great place where we used to explore and climb trees, look for birds' eggs and eat wild blackberries and chestnuts. It was good fun in the winter when the snow came to go tobogganing on the common and ride from the top to the bottom of the 'oller as it was called, we would be freezing cold and wringing wet but we would not have a care in the world.

When war broke out in September 1939, I remember the first time the air raid siren went off. I was buying an ice cream from Mr Butler's ice cream cart with my mother, just by the Ship Pub opposite the Links shops.

The siren was about 20 yards away and it scared the hell out of me, I grabbed Mr Butler and would not let go of him, I was only four years old at the time.

I went to Timbercroft Primary School from 1940 to 1946. We spent a lot of time in the air raid shelters as the war was on and there would be air raids most every day. We kids would pick up the shrapnel and incendiary bomb cases we found, being sharp and jagged these would

make big holes in your pockets.



. *The Ship Inn, Plumstead Common.*

I slept in my auntie Nell's brick shelter in a hammock until we got our own Morrison indoor shelter. We would stand on the Common and watch the German bombers drop their bombs on Woolwich Arsenal. I remember seeing the whole of the River Thames glowing red all the way to London in the Blitz, later on in the war we would watch the Spitfire's chase the "doodlebugs", V1 rockets, but when the engines cut out we would dive into the shelter, as you did not know where they would end up. Many a time we had the front door blown off and lots of windows broken from bomb blasts. The V2's were the worst as you never had any warning they were coming, one of my friends from school Donald Lush was killed just as he was leaving home for school, we had a service for him at Timbercroft School.

*\*See story: Ken Costin's Blast From The Past.*

I used to lay in bed at night listening to the German bombers coming over and hearing the 'crump' of the bombs falling in the nearby streets, the ack ack guns firing into the sky and hearing a plane that had been hit screaming to the ground. You could look out and see the searchlights crisscrossing the night sky looking for the enemy planes. The big barrage balloons that seemed to be everywhere, all along the river Thames; the Germans would try and set them on fire with their guns and it was a spectacular sight to see them fall flaming to the ground when a balloon got hit. We had one on Winn's Common and one over on Plumstead Common by the Links. I remember the Land Mine that fell in Alabama Street; it did a lot of damage and killed quite a few people. We tried to get close to it the next day but was told to keep away by the police. Also Duncroft Road where my friend Donald Lush was killed, that was a mess when we got there, stuff strewn across the road and broken furniture everywhere.

You got used to seeing bomb damage every day during the Blitz, houses reduced to piles of rubble and fires all over the place. It was hard to walk down the streets on the way to school

with the rubble that was around, you had to literally pick your way over the stuff. Don't know how the fire brigade and the ambulances got through the streets sometimes. There were always people with shovels clearing and digging. We had a German plane come down on Winn's Common. I remember it crashing and we all took off to see where it had crashed, when we got there the Home Guard had got the pilot, who had bailed out, and the plane was on the Common. Later on you could visit and sit in it for a few coppers, thru'pence or a tanner (6d) I think it was. My family were lucky because we never got bombed out; I think a lady down the street got killed by a bomb landing on her house.

As kids we did not take the war as seriously as our parents, it was a good time for us although everything was on ration, we had no sweets or ice cream. Mum used to get dried egg out of a packet and whatever else your ration book allowed you to have.

On VE day we had a street party with bunting hanging from all the houses. It was the day I got my first full size bike. It was an Armstrong, second hand of course. We had some shops down at the Slade, Allen's the paper shop, also a electrical shop, Bogg's the greengrocers, a barber and a few other shops, I used to cycle round to Allen's to get the morning paper every day. One morning as I was coming back there was a bus parked at the bus stop opposite our street and as I pulled out from behind it to turn into my street another bus coming the other way hit me. I woke up in St Nicholas hospital with my anxious mother looking very worried at my bedside. I was very lucky, only the bike was bent and scratched. Mr Swanston took the frame into the A.M.C. Factory, where the A.J.S. and Matchless motor bikes were made, to get it straightened out and, with a couple of second hand wheels, it was as good as ever.

There were two characters who were always on the Common, one was the Park Keeper nicknamed "Gritty Whiskers". He was a grumpy old bugger, always telling kids off for nothing, he always thought you were up to something or other. All the kids would try and keep out of his way, you could spot him from a distance with his brown suit and hat and his pointed stick that he picked up any litter with.

The other was a man we called the "Riddle Man" he was a well dressed man in a suit and hat, he would walk the common asking kids riddles, he had a big red nose, all the kids would look for him. I think he may have been a religious man as he would give out little printed cards with verses from the Bible printed on them if you got the riddle correct.

After primary school I went to Ancona Road Secondary School. One day, on the way back to school after lunch, I ventured into the lake on the common and while crossing the walkway in the middle I slipped and fell in and had mud up to my neck. One of the older boys, "Wishy" White, pulled me out. I went on to school and on arrival was told to get out of my wet clothes. I spent the afternoon wearing only John Swanston's overcoat while my clothes dried on the radiator.



*1953 on my B.S.A. 250.*



*1954 on my A.J.S. Twin.*

Later Ancona Road School was turned into an all girls' school and I was transferred to Woolwich Central School for Boys in Bloomfield Road. I attended there until 1951. My favourite teacher was Nobby Clarke, he would take a lot of the boys cycling in Kent in the summer months and also took us to Brands Hatch to watch the motorbike races.

I played in the school football teams, usually the 2nd and 3rd teams, but was the youngest pupil ever to play in the team, at the age of only 15, as most were aged 17 and 18, in the 1st team. I remember playing for the Lipton Cup and I was only in 3rd year at the time.



I had a job after school doing grocery deliveries for a shop in Herbert Road; I had one of those delivery bikes with a basket over the smaller front wheel to put the groceries in. I had to deliver to houses up Eglington Hill and surrounding streets. I usually had to push the bike up the hills as the roads were very steep in that area, but it was a good ride back down to the shop. This was in the late 1940's and I

was paid about 15 bob a week and I would also receive some good tips from the customers, especially around Christmas time. I gave the job away after about 9 months.

Usually when we finished school in the afternoon my friends and I would cycle down to the A.J.S./Matchless factory in Maxey Road to watch the test riders test the new motorbikes. They would kick them over and rev them up then rock the bike forward off the stand and roar up the street, then, when they got back, they would sit there revving the bike up again until they were satisfied all was OK. My mates and I would try and make sprung frames for our pushbikes. We would get metal tubes and put big springs in them for the front forks and put long seats with plungers on the back as well, we would cycle to Dartford Heath and ride over the humps there, it was a great place to do what is now called "Motor cross", we were actually doing it years ago.

Eventually I got my motorcycle license along with my mates, we had a great assortment of bikes between us, most of which were of the 1930 to 1940 vintage as that was all we could afford. My first was a Royal Enfield 125cc Flying Flea. I also had a 250cc B.S.A. and a 650cc Triumph Thunderbird, but my best bike was a 1953 A.J.S. 500cc Speedtwin that I bought straight from the A.M.C. Factory that Ted Cook a test rider managed to obtain for me. My mates and I would go to all the bike races held at such venues as Brands Hatch, Silverstone, Thruxton and Goodwood, we also made a few trips to the Isle of Man to see the TT races in the 1950's.

I left school in 1951 and became an apprentice Compositor to a Printing Company in Deptford; I had to do a six-year apprenticeship with one day and two nights at Technical College. I did my National Service in the R.A.F. between 1956 and 1958, and had a few months left to do to finish my apprenticeship when I came out of the R.A.F. as I had got deferred until I was 20. I did my square bashing at Padgate and my trade training at Compton Bassett, then I was stationed at Newmarket and Stanbridge. I was in Aden for most of 1957-8 when the Suez crisis was on. I worked in a few places after coming out of the forces, at New Cross, Farringdon Street in the City, then at the end of Southwark Bridge opposite Courage's Brewery. My last job in England was at J. D. Garrods in Plumstead High Street near the Plumstead railway station.

I was in the 10th Woolwich Scouts and was in the choir of The Church of the Ascension in Timbercroft Lane for many years. I got married there in December 1958. I lived in Dallin Road close to Shrewsbury Park where we had two boys, one in 1961 and the other in 1963. I played a lot of golf at Shooters Hill Golf Club when Ernie Vaux was the professional there; I also played most of the public golf courses in nearby Kent.

We emigrated with our two sons to Sydney, Australia in December 1965. I remarried in 1975 to a lady from Manchester who also had two sons from a previous marriage. We have 13 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren between us. We live in Baulkham Hills a suburb of Sydney.






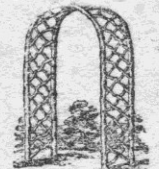


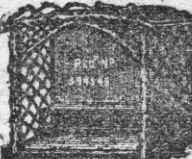
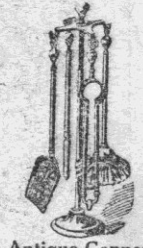

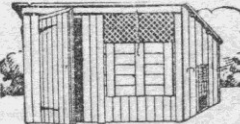


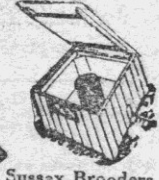
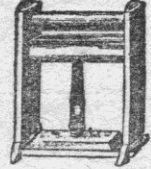


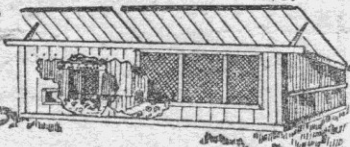
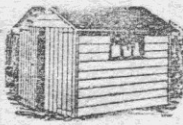


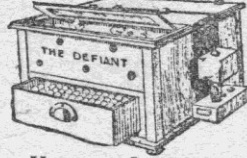

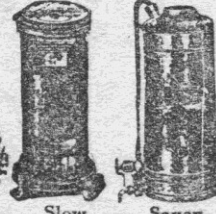

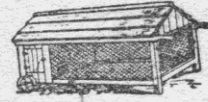

I am now retired; I worked as a production Manager for a large Printing Company for the last 10 years of my working life.

I play golf every Wednesday at Richmond Golf Club and teach Tai Chi on Monday and Saturday mornings. I still support Charlton Athletic Football Club; we would go to the

Valley as kids every home game, from just after the war in 1945. I can still remember most of the old players names, and I have always followed them through their ups and downs.

I suppose if I went back to Plumstead I would find many changes have taken place, but I know our old house at No 5 is still the same as one of my mates was good enough to take a couple of photo's of it a few weeks ago for me (2008). I still remember Plumstead as it was and it holds many fond memories of my childhood growing up there. There is nowhere like your roots. I will always remember MY PLUMSTEAD.

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# *My Uncle*

*Derek Crompton*

I went to Conway School (1957-1963) and then to Bloomfield Road School.

My uncle Dennis Bowden, is the boy in the picture, the third in from right front row with the school cap (Conway). My grandfather lived there before moving to Piedmont Road. My uncle (the only one I know in the picture) died in 1956 in Kenya. These were taken on a day visit to my uncle, Dennis Bowden, whilst he was on school evacuation in Kent at the start of WW2. Notice the gas mask boxes. After this my mother Ivy took Dennis down to Cornwall. Their mother followed. But my grandfather stayed in Plumstead throughout the war. He also refused to have an air raid shelter. He left later on for Cornwall in the 1950's. He used to work in the Royal Arsenal before retiring. I was too young to remember him.



*Durham Road Coronation Street Party (1937).*

*'S. Paine was the photographer, of 2a Brewery Road, Plumstead'.*



*(Left) Dennis Bowden (the one without the stick) and unknown other person. (Right) My mother, Ivy Crompton (nee Bowden) with the little girl Lyn Alexandra, our next door neighbour, and me. My Plumstead roots are on my mothers Bowden family, originally from Devon in the mid 1800's.*



*Dennis Bowden is standing behind girl. The woman with the hat is his mother, Alice Bowden ( nee Johnson). Others unknown.*



*These photos were taken on the 6th June 1953, at the Queens Coronation party in the Waverly School building (now demolished). I am in my mother's arms in each photo.*

*Photos supplied by Derek Crompton*



# *Myrtle Waylett (nee Bradford) Story*

I was born on 21.08.1941 and raised at Woodhurst Road, Abbey Wood, S.E.2.

I went to Church Manorway School (infants), then on to Bannockburn Junior School and then back to Church Manorway Senior School.

I had four brothers and two sisters but, sadly, in the summer of 1949, my eldest sister, Margaret (then 12 years old), met with a tragic accident at the level crossing in Abbey Wood. She had been fishing with one of my brothers, but came back early, leaving him still fishing for newts and frogs. On the way back, she had to walk along the grass verge at the edge of the railway line where, unbeknown to the public, the signal wires ran through the grass. She caught her toe in this wire and fell straight onto the live rail. She was burnt to death instantly.

That day, a beautiful summer's day, our family had all decided to go over to my dad's allotment and have a picnic on the grass close to their shed. There was mum, aunt Ann, me, my little sister Marion, only two years old, and youngest brother Edward, six months old. As we walked down the road to that same level crossing, there were police, lots of people and an ambulance. Mum and aunt Ann were saying, "I wonder what's going on. Perhaps someone has been run over by a train." As we got nearer, a lady said to my mum that a young woman had committed suicide. My mum's brain immediately kicked in, realising that Margaret was in that vicinity, and she began to cry, fearing the worst. Someone took us all into their house and gave us tea and my dad was summoned from his allotment.

My little sister and I were whisked off to a friend's house, where we played happily until later in the evening, not realising the impact of what had happened until we got home and the household was in such distress. My dad shut himself in the bedroom but mum, of course, consoled constantly by aunt Ann, had to carry on, get the tea and generally see to the family. Dad went to the hospital in the ambulance and had to identify her body, which, of course, was very badly burnt.

He was never the same after that. We could not mention her name in his presence ever again. Mum was able to talk about it but none of us ever really got over it. I inherited her little silver ring that she had bought with her birthday money and I have passed this on to my beautiful granddaughter, Emily.

Needless to say, we were never offered compensation, nor was there any admission of bad practice or blame on behalf of British Rail and mum used to say that no amount of compensation would bring our Margaret back anyway.

Just recalling these events in this story has made me cry, even after all these years.



*The old Woolwich Free Ferry. (Southern Approach)*

Anyway, on to better memories:

Before Margaret died, all us kids often took trips across the Woolwich Ferry and visit the park in North Woolwich. We used to love the old ferryboats where we could go and view the engine room and smell the grease and the heat. We

found it so fascinating. The smell of the river and the white foam around the boat, the wind in our hair and our jam sandwiches and bottle of lemonade in a shopping bag, what freedom we had.

After Margaret died, I grew up very quickly and had to take responsibility for my three younger siblings. Not that this happened too often as mum didn't work (not with seven kids to see to and she was a wonderful mum) but if we went roaming the streets or over the railway bridge at the bottom of Church Manorway and into the fields beyond or to the park in Blithdale Road, I had to look after the others. I think I went from eight to fifteen years old in a very short while.

After leaving school I went on to commercial college to learn typing, shorthand, book keeping etc; getting my first job at the age of 17.

By then I was courting a young man from Charlton who was doing an apprenticeship in the Woolwich Arsenal. His name was Tony Gibbs and we were married in September 1961 at St Nicholas Church, Plumstead. Our marriage lasted for 20 years.

During that time, I worked in offices, just opposite the Arsenal Main Gate, overlooking the market and was there for about four years before starting my family.



All four of my brothers, Jim, Donald, Tony and Edward, all went to Wickham Lane (affectionately known as "Whack'em College"). Bostall Woods virtually backed onto this school and all of us have great memories of roaming the woods, picking bluebells (and getting chased by the keeper), collecting chestnuts in autumn and picnics on the grandstand. It was our playground. I spent some of my courting time in the woods too, but I won't go into details on that one!

My eldest brother, Jim Bradford, now in his 70's, (2006), used to get bullied somewhat until, that is, he had a friend called Johnny Beadle. John was a very strange boy (in a nice sort of way). He was the strong, silent type and he and my brother were bosom pals for many years. John, I am told, lived on cheese sandwiches and was so strong that he could lift the back end of a car off the road with one hand (or was that my brother's slight exaggeration). Anyway, he was very powerful. One day, on the way home from school, Jim was being pursued by some boys who used to bully him. But this particular day, they were in for a surprise as Johnny was lying in wait up a tree. Jim obviously led them to that tree and at the appropriate time, John dropped from the tree, onto one of the other boys and proceeded to give him a pasting. Jim was never bullied again!

Tony Gibbs and I used to go to ballroom dancing at evening classes and we have some great memories of that too. I still do ballroom dancing, even though I am in my middle 60's and riddled with arthritis, but it helps keep the old body mobile and I love it. Some of the music we dance to is very evocative of those early days at night school, when all the girls used to rush to the cloakroom to put on our make-up out of the sight of our parents, do our hair for the umpteenth time, and then join the rather impatient boys in the school hall ready to start our dance lessons.

I am sure there are lots more memories still dormant in my brain, of Abbey Wood, Plumstead and Woolwich, the parks, the woods, the ferry, the cinemas where we went once a week, Saturday morning pictures at the Century Cinema in Plumstead and walking home through the back streets; buying Lingo fizz (a kind of sherbet that fizzed on your tongue and was so acid that it must have caused untold damage on our teeth).



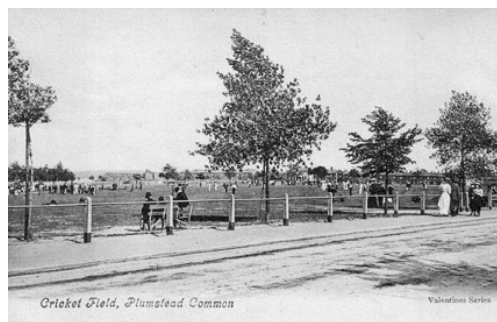
# *Of Life In The Plumstead Common Area In The 1930's*

*Stan Bush*

School was at Timbercroft Lane School from 1929, when we moved down from Dallin Road (near Shrewsbury Park) because my dear mother, who was stricken with severe arthritis in 1929, had to live in a flatter area. It was a happy school for me (and many others) as it was a single storey complex of Infants, Junior Girls and Junior Boys (not mixed) and we had no steep stairs to climb. My first form master was Mr Blackley, a single gentleman who lived in Plumstead Common Road and had served in the trenches in WW1. He was a rather serious person but I don't remember him ever raising his voice in anger. He also played the piano at assembly and singing lessons. My next form master was Mr Mitchell, who was more amiable and used to read 'Just William' stories, imitating the various accents including the piping voice of Violet Elizabeth as well as the basic English of William Brown and friends. My last form master was Mr Bob Jones, also a WW1 soldier, who suffered from shell shock. Being in charge of ten-year-olds, he was more of a disciplinarian and raised his voice on occasion. He used to line us up in the playground before we entered the building and get us warmed up on cold days with a few exercises before marching in. A fourth master, who was in his twenties, was Mr Corker and he took the seven-year-olds. The Headmaster, Mr John Mayer, was a rather military-looking gentleman, complete with clipped moustache, and was a very popular figure who enjoyed talking to us boys about his life experiences when the occasion arose. We saw little of the girl's school because of a 6-7 foot dividing fence, which we were not allowed to climb!! Their Headmistress was Miss Ambler.

During World War 2 the school was evacuated and used as a First Aid Station. I don't think the school was damaged by air raids or 'V' weapons, but there were several near misses. Mr Mayer had a 1930's Morris Oxford saloon and Mr Corker a bull-nosed Morris Cambridge with a canvas top, and the other master either cycled or used 'shanks pony.'

On one side of the school was an orchard and on another was a field, but in the middle and late '30's these were both built on. At the age of eleven I went to Woolwich Central School in Bloomfield Road and walked twice in each direction every day along the full length of Plumstead Common Road. I can remember the names of all the teachers of Woolwich Central School between 1938 and 1939.



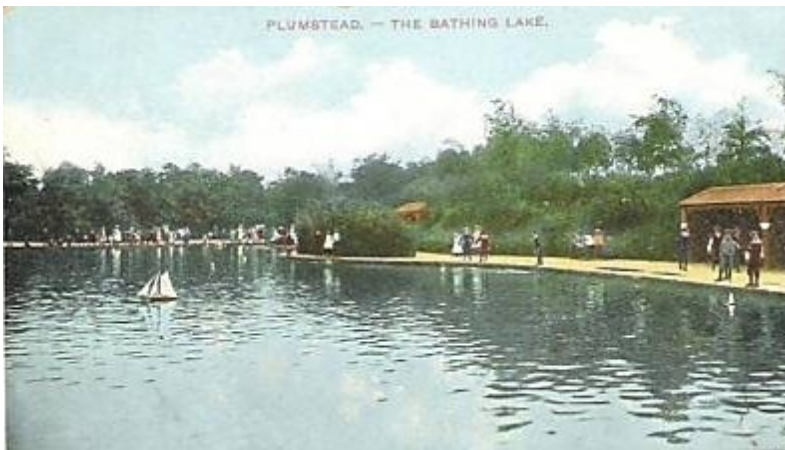
*Cricket on Plumstead Common.*

The Royal Woolwich Arsenal Cricket Knock-out Cup Competition was played in the 1930's, attracting quite a few spectators, especially on Final night when several hundred people attended. Departments taking part included Central Office, Light Gun and Carriage Factory, Filling factories, Heavy Gun Factory and R.N. Ordnance Department. Harold and George Head were regulars with Central Office and George Mann (fast bowler) and Bill (Jack) Carver (a swashbuckling wicket keeper and batsman) for the Light Gun and Carriage Factory. Regular weekend teams included St Mark's Church, Plumstead Radical Club and Slade Sports from the People's Hall near the Slade, for which I was fixtures secretary for a few years after WWII. My brothers Arthur and Jim also played for Slade Sports. Between wars my father played for St Paul's C.C. There were a few occasions over the years when windows of the houses and a pub ('Prince Albert,' I believe) facing the Common (in Old Mill Road) had cricket balls through them and a few buses sustained dents. A Mr Smith from nearby Flaxton Road was the keeper in charge for many years and the pitches were off limits to all bar the players. Now the sacred turf has, of all things, been converted to rugby pitches.

On the opposite side of the bus station we boys were allowed to play and it was not 'uncommon' (pardon the pun) to see as many as a dozen games going on. When two matches were played on the main common, a normal practice, the outfielders of both matches on one side were back to back and had to watch over their shoulders for balls from the other contest!!

### **Family History**

My father, Albert E. (Ted) Bush was born and brought up in Lakedale Road at No 176, which is opposite the former boating pond on Winn's Common. In the '20's my grandfather



(Henry) turned the front room into a small general store. He served in the Devonshire Regiment (11th foot) for twelve years (1877-1889) and moved to Plumstead in 1885, where he lived until he died in 1949 aged ninety- one. Dad used to swim in the lake but his great passion was football. He played alongside the famous

Arsenal and England footballer Charlie Buchan when they were at Plumstead High Street School together. My father's sister Minnie was in service in Charlton and in her late teens in 1909 was knocked down in Beresford Square, Woolwich and died three days later in St Nicholas Hospital. The car driver was a Captain Bush! I have yet to find out whether he was a naval, merchant navy or army officer as the newspaper report did not give this information.

### **Winn's Common**

Winn's Common was the stony extension to Plumstead Common (now grassed over) and at one time was used for football pitches, army exercises (cavalry) and the occasional fair ground. During WW II a barrage balloon unit was stationed there. In 1937 or '38 there was a

fair ground which involved a man called 'Peggy' (he had one wooden leg) who dived into a tank of water from an 80 or 90 foot tower twice daily, the second occasion after dark and in flames! An emergency aircraft landing strip was added at the far end but was never used for that purpose and was converted into football pitches after the war. A 'pre-fab' estate was built on the common after WWII, ostensibly for ten years but lasted over twice that long. Mr Cyril Bull, local JP and Headmaster of Foxhill School, had a house in Rockmount Road at the far end of the Common. From the windows of the upper floors it was possible to see the forest of funnels and masts in the North Woolwich Docks. I little realised that in a few years I would be sailing on some of those ships during WWII remember the day the, then new, 'Mauritania' squeezed through the lock gates of the King George V Dock with inches to spare. The experience was never repeated!!

I also have a lot of memories of the Slade and Kirkham Street areas from 1929 to 1954, including annual outings from the Plumstead Common Working Men's Club, when around twenty coaches lined up in Kirkham Street and Flaxton Road to take children of members on a day trip to Sheerness. Also, horse-drawn funeral processions on their way to the cemeteries off Swingate Lane, which were a frequent occurrence.

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# *Our Old Dog Tony*

*Colin Weightman*

As long as I could remember, as a young boy growing up, my constant companion was Tony.

Tony was our dog. He was just an ordinary dog, a longhaired, medium sized, black and tan mongrel with a very quiet and friendly nature. He was treated just like any other member of the family. To me Tony was just like living with another brother.

Tony never owned a collar and was never on a lead. He followed us kids everywhere and accompanied us on many of our all-day adventures.

During long warm summer days he would often sleep in the middle of the road; not much traffic in those days.

When, on the occasions we were to get on a bus, usually at the Woodman pub bus terminal, Tony would follow us all the way, but then had to be told, very sternly, to “Go home,” often several times, before he finally got the message that he wasn't allowed to come out with us for a trip. He would then look quite miserable as he lowered his head and turned to go back home.

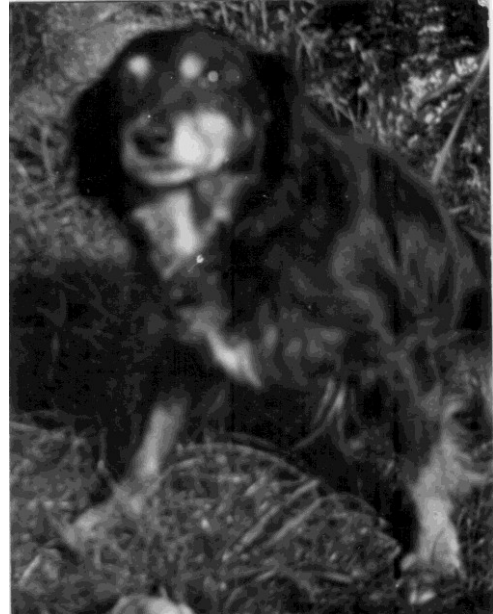
But all was forgiven later when we eventually returned back home, where he would rush up the road to greet you, leaping up and down, yapping happily, madly wagging his tail, as if he'd hadn't seen you for many weeks.

Tony was born on a searchlight battery in 1939, at the start of WWII, and as a pup was brought up amongst soldiers. My dad was with the RA at Woolwich and was stationed at that time with the searchlight battery, before he later became a gunner on the anti-aircraft gun batteries.

Dad was found to be deaf in one ear and so he then served as a fireman with the Auxiliary Fire Service.

It was whilst serving on the searchlights that he adopted Tony and brought him home, as dad remembers him, “as a tiny bundle of black fur snugly held inside his army jacket”.

During these earlier war years Tony went missing for several weeks. They thought where on earth had he disappeared. Then, one day when my mother was shopping in Beresford Square market, there he was! He was following up the rear of some soldiers marching through town. He was soon happily reunited with the family again.



*Our dog Tony.*

About five years later, I was born, in June 1944, and so we grew up together.

Mum would often get Tony a huge 'H' bone from the butchers. He would happily tackle this big bone for hours at a time it seemed, holding it in his front paws as he gnawed and chewed his way through it. The bone would be on the back lawn for days; each day it got smaller and smaller until it finally disappeared.

The trouble with Tony, after these sessions of consuming the bone, was the aftermath! Often enough, when the family was sitting in the living room and Tony was asleep on the floor, without warning, an odour would slowly permeate the room. Then, when someone exclaimed, 'Pooh!' Tony would immediately get up and he'd walk to the door with his head down, to be let out. Often though, it was not he that was to blame but someone else, but he seemed to know that he was going to get the blame anyway, so he'd get on his way anyhow.

When he wanted to be let back in he would give a single bark at the front door and another single bark if the first wasn't heard and he would continue like this until he was let in. If he was ignored and he was not let in, his bark would eventually be preceded with a growl, as if he was saying to us..."You so and so's, let me flipping in!"



*My dad, Frank, (Back row, left) on duty as a fireman with the crew of the Auxiliary Fire Service and their Tender near the junction of Winn's Common, on Lakedale and King's Highway Roads, sometime during the second world war.*

In later life, as he got older, he grew rather deaf and his eyes a bit dimmer. He used to suffer with epileptic fits, but these were fairly infrequent. We would put a cold flannel on his forehead when he had one and he was soon up and about, right as rain again.

He always had an active life and he enjoyed plenty of action, even into his old age. At seventeen he still enjoyed a good romp and chasing after sticks over on the Common. This was his usual routine, after he was bathed at home in the bath. He hated his bath and when he suspected it was being run for him he would go and hide. Then, when he was found, he was carried to the bath where he was shampooed, rinsed and then dried, rubbed down with an old towel. Then it was off with us kids, over to the Common where he would run and jump and play until he was dry enough. His coat would really shine in the sun.

When we moved from Plumstead, over to Manor Park in east London, this move was the end for my good old mate Tony.

Mum let him out on the second or so night in our house in Manor Park. Mum said that he walked down the road a bit, turned and looked at her, and he walked off into the night.

Tony never came back.

Our family searched the streets and called out his name for many days after he disappeared. We put adverts in all the local shops and newspapers and phoned the council to see if a dog with his description had been found, dead or alive. We went and visited Battersea Dogs Home and did everything possible to find him. We also notified our old former neighbours to keep a look out for him.

Tony was never ever seen again. The PDSA suggested that Tony, being seventeen and a half years old, had decided to go away to die. They said that it was sometimes what an elderly cat or dog would choose to do. To simply go off when they felt that their time had come and find a quite private spot and lie down and await death.

It was the 'not knowing' of what had happened to Tony that was the worst bit about his demise, especially after his being with us for so long and being such a wonderful and faithful companion.



# *Pig Bin Days*

*Colin Weightman*

I remember the large heavy-duty pig bins that were distributed throughout all the roads of our local districts. In Sladedale Rd they were situated at regular intervals along the path, our nearest one was next to the lamppost, top of the 'oller', opposite Goldsmid Street and Dickins corner shop.

As a small kid it was my job to take any scraps over to it. I hated having to struggle with lifting the very heavy-duty lid before putting in the scraps.

The powerful sickly smell, especially during the summer heat, was another unwelcome reason for not wanting to go near the bin. All too often the lid would be left half on, or completely off, which resulted in clouds of buzzing flies when disturbed from their feast and worse still were the numerous threatening wasps. Yes, approaching the bin after these long hot spells was the worst. Knowing that with every approaching step what was going to assail my eyes and nose when I lifted that heavy galvanized lid!

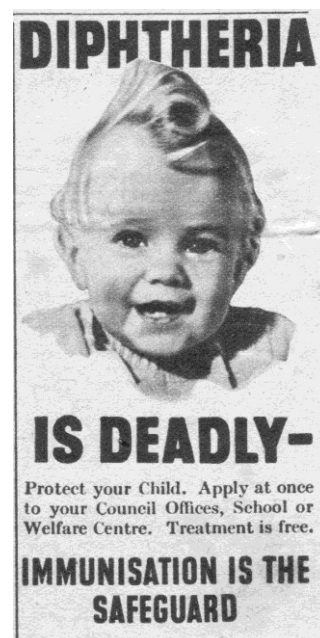
A terrible stomach turning slush of slimy food scraps, churning and writhing with fat maggots would sometimes greet you, followed immediately by a breath taking blast of the foulest stinkiest smell from hell. Holding my breath I would quickly scrape the plate of scraps into this hellhole. Then, finally, after replacing the lid, and red faced from holding my breath, I could then take a great gulp of fresh air!

These pig bins were emptied by the council bin men. They'd tip them into small curved shaped, side loading, lorries that had sliding shutters. Foul smelling water ran dripping onto the road from these smelly lorries.

The pig bins were the government's solution of recycling valuable food scraps for pig food during the very lean years in Britain following the Second World War.

Then, suddenly, the dreaded pig bins disappeared! My mother said that the bins were taken away after they were blamed for causing a large outbreak of diphtheria. I blamed them for a lot of other unmentionable things!

But anyway, it was sure good not have to endure them any more.



# *Plumstead Baths And A Tragic Birthday*

*Ellen Searle*

I had a friend living next door, who was the same age as me. On October 8, 1940, it was his birthday, and we decided to commemorate it by going swimming in Plumstead Baths.

We arrived to find that a bomb had fallen on a shelter in Woolwich Arsenal, and it killed 200 people. They were using the baths for the mortuary, so we couldn't go swimming. So we had to go back home then, and in the evening we had a big raid, so we went into the shelter.

A landmine landed on the fence between their shelter and our shelter, and my friend was killed and so was his mother. I was blinded, so I lost most of the sight in my left eye, but they operated and saved the sight in my right eye after the war.



*Plumstead Baths covered over for a function in 1912.  
Photo kind permission Greenwich Heritage Centre.*

*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)*

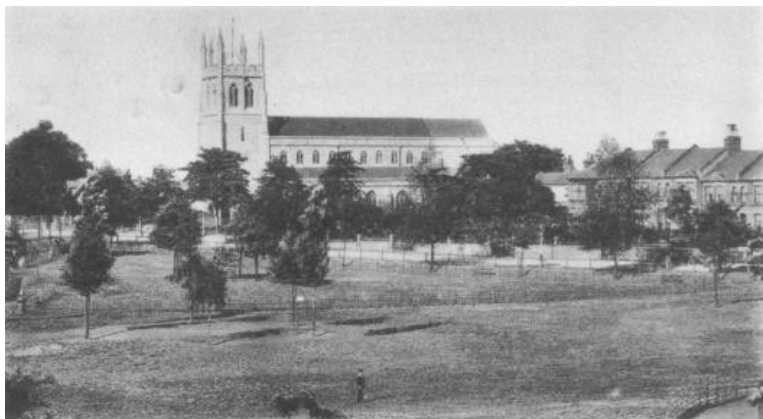
# *Plumstead Common*

*Elsie Frost*

Born in 1925 I lived for forty years on Plumstead Common Road in a house opposite the old Globe Cinema, now a block of flats.

Before the Second World War, when I was small, the Common was our 'adventure playground.' Clumps of trees or mounds were to us ships, or castles, or whatever the current film showing at the Globe was about. We did not have to see the film: there were always a number of still photos shown outside the Cinema. We, of course, had to be escorted over busy Plumstead Common Road, and when we were ready to come home we would gather by the sand bin on the Common and the first adult to come along would take us across the road. We were watched over, while we played, by the Common Park Keepers, large (to us) men in brown suits, brown pork-pie hats, and brown leather gloves, who patrolled in twos, and of whom we were a little scared!

Sometimes there was a wedding to see at St Margaret's Church. There were concerts at the bandstand on a weekday evening and on Sundays. We listened to them with our parents,



*St Margaret's Church.*

from the terraces opposite the bandstand, and were allowed to run about between, but not during the items played.

On Armistice Day we would watch the veterans of the First World War march to the memorial on the Common to the men of the 8th Howitzer Brigade RFA and would listen to the short service held there.

The Slade Ravine was another part of the Common we would visit, running up and down the steps, and we would go to the pools on Winn's Common – in this case with our parents or other grown-ups. One pool was for paddling, and the other was deeper for splashing about and 'swimming.'

If we tired of the Common, we could walk to the top of Plum Lane to Shrewsbury Park, and then through to Eaglesfield, and to the paddling pool there. The opportunities for children to play in the area seemed endless, and we took great advantage of them.

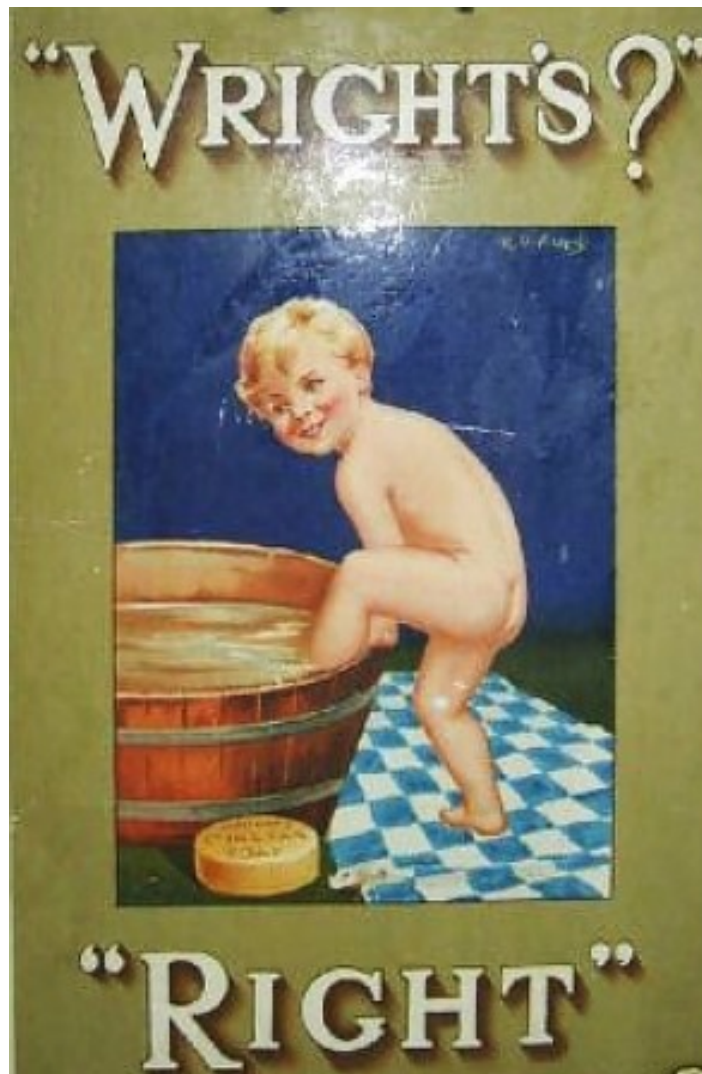
Plumstead Common Road, from Bird's Nest Hollow to the Links Co-operative Stores, was a popular local shopping centre. Almost everything was catered for – butchers, bakers, grocers, greengrocers, fishmongers, barbers and hairdressers etc. There was a florist, a corn chandler, and 'oil shop,' selling all sorts of hardware, nails (by the ounce), candles, paints, and of course paraffin oil.

Buses, as now, ran to Woolwich and beyond, including those of a private company,

Timpson's, which were coloured yellow, and there was great rivalry between the drivers of the bus companies.

World War 2 changed many things – not only on Plumstead Common, but I can still recognise areas where my friends and I played many years ago, and I still see children there playing games very much as we did – so perhaps after all some things never change.

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



# *Plumstead Common Balloon Site 1942*

*Joan Hume*

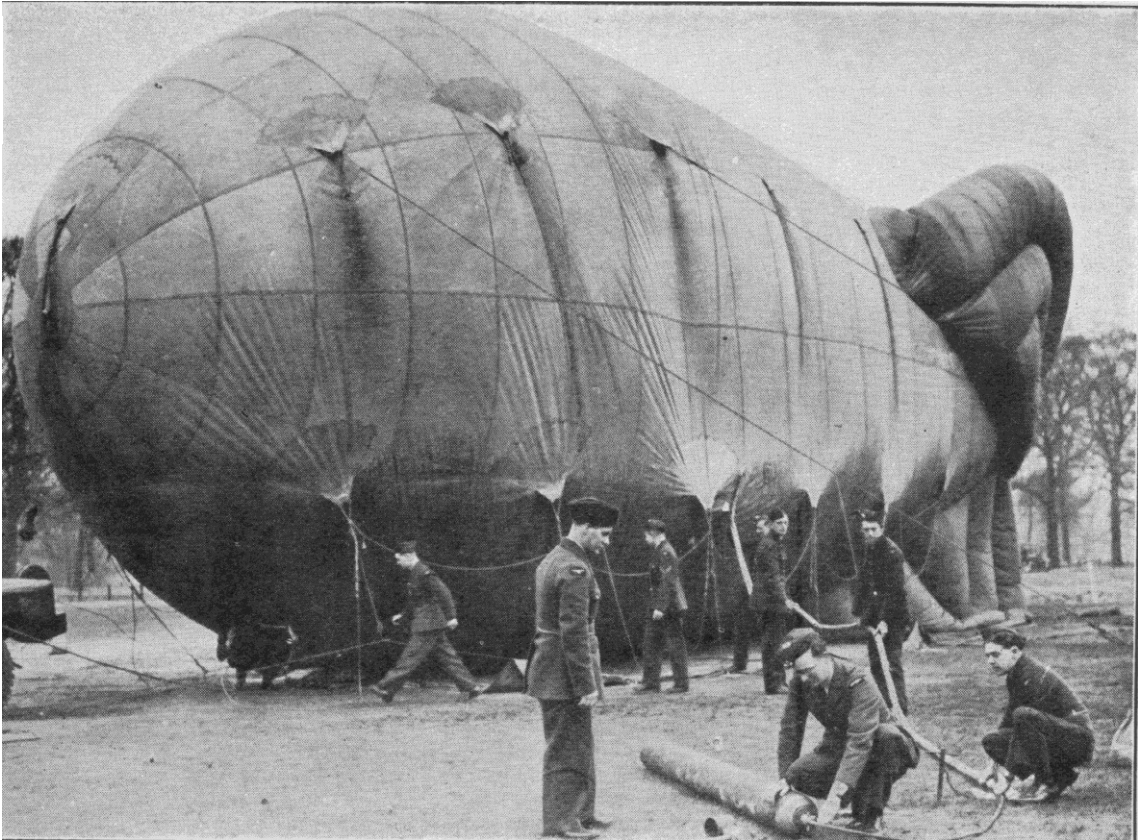
I joined the WAAF as a barrage balloon operative in June 1942. After initial training (square bashing) I was posted to No.1 BC RAF Kidbrooke training school, where I spent eleven weeks. The great thing about Kidbrooke was that the station band was the Sky-rockets, led by Cpl. Paul Fenhoulet who had been a dance band trombonist and, as was usual when dance band musicians were called up, they were posted together to form bands and were able to provide entertainment and play for dances. They also played for morning parade and the commuters into Waterloo used to find this very entertaining as the parade ground was beside the track.

The last two weeks of training were spent on a site on Plumstead Common, where the Corporal Instructors were in charge of Practical Experience. The whole intake was billeted in a commandeered house in St Margaret's Road [now Grove]. The number escapes me, but it was somewhere towards the south end of the terrace. The balloon site was on the common immediately across the road. A crew was made up to



man the site twenty-four hours at a time. We had our meals in another house further down the road, to the left, which was occupied by the cooks. This might have been the drill hall [now temple]. I don't remember much more about this short period of my service career, apart from crossing on the Woolwich Ferry to go to the pictures.

The balloon site itself consisted of a perimeter wire, supported at intervals by stakes to which the tail of the balloon was tethered by a pulley. The main cable of the balloon was fixed to a pulley in the centre. When the wind veered, the tail pulley had to be moved to the appropriate section of the perimeter wire. If the wind became very strong the balloon was then tethered to the ground by ropes from the rigging to concrete blocks. The main cable was led along the ground and onto a drum on the winch operated by a petrol engine on a trailer. There was also a stack of bottles of hydrogen with which the balloon was filled. The gas pressure was checked daily and topped up as necessary.



*Barrage Balloon being inflated with hydrogen WWII.*

*Photos were added to the original story.*

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



# *Plumstead Common Reminiscence*

*Douglas Johnson aged 91*

One of the effects of the Second World War was that thousands of factories were vacated by their normal occupants so that the premises could be used for war production; and when the war came to an end such factories were empty. One of these was Tealedown, near Bounds Green Underground Station in North London. Tealedown was the brand name for bed covers. Ultimately, this company would be resurrected, but for several years the premises were occupied by a new division of Standard Telephones & Cables Ltd., employers of Doug Johnson, who joined them because of his experiences in the Royal Corps of Signals, and now lived in an 1899 house in Walthamstow.

By 1951 Tealedown were re-organised and wanted their factory back, so Standard Telephones moved to Footscray, south of the river. Travel by coach was arranged for about nine months, to give staff time to move. After that, travel had to be by train and bus, so for the Johnson's, still trying, removal was becoming urgent. There weren't many houses on the market in our price class. We'd tried maisonettes, but these were usually upstairs, with outside concrete staircases, lethal for a four-year-old boy and difficult for a pram, and main bedrooms so small that a double bed would overlap the fireplace. Then came a real prospect, a three-bedroom house in Plumstead! We had doubts about it because Plumstead had the reputation of a district with poor housing and lots of bomb damage, but the price was low.

We walked up the hill from Plumstead Station, and the houses were impressive, the footpath lined with trees. At the top of the hill there was a wide stretch of grass. We stopped at a drinking fountain and asked for directions. "Pegwell Street? Up the lane from the Slade, past the Who'd a Thought It."

This is Plumstead Common, green space stretching a long way in both directions. One path goes past the bowling greens and tennis courts and miniature golf, with hedges around them, a pavilion and a teashop with seats in a little garden! Then that magnificent avenue of trees, leading to the Co-op, a big shop with many departments. One bus route terminates here. There are three or four pubs, a church, a first class school, a ravine, and a paddling pool. There are high-class toilets, a play area, and superb plane trees everywhere.

Pegwell Street was comparatively modern, built on the gardens of older houses, and No 3 was what we wanted. Plumstead Common was like the ideal village green, with a pavilion and a cricket pitch. There was a school about two hundred yards away. Because of a small garden, the price of the house was only £1,895; but could we afford it? We had worked so hard modernising the Walthamstow house that



we had £400 to use as a deposit, and all the people we dealt with were kind to us. Our Prudential agent arranged the endowments for the mortgage. On February 29th 1952 we

travelled with all our possessions in the back of a van through the cobbled Blackwall Tunnel, able to see nothing but the surface of the road. Our son Tony was intrigued, but it was good to get out.

We couldn't be luckier. Rates were low. Woolwich Borough Council had libraries, baths, social centres, and concert halls. The local school, run by the London County Council had a superb Head teacher, the commons and the woodlands stretched in all directions, maintained by park keepers in brown uniform. There were seats and shelters, teahouses, toilets, sports facilities, pavilions and gardens. There were five major hospitals. Leisure activities were widespread. We had some good years.

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

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# *Plumstead Memories*

*Tony Allison*

It was about 1948 when I was relocated to the address of 77 Rockmount Road in Plumstead. My name at that time was Tony O'Connor, although I didn't know anybody else with that surname. I had moved from Liverpool where I had been a wartime refugee. Children from London had been sent out to lovely places such as Cornwall, Devon and so on – I had been evacuated to Liverpool, and they bombed buggery out of us up there. I remember how bad I felt that I couldn't take my shrapnel collections with me.

This was about my sixth move since being born in 1941 in Colchester; I was to end up having seven 'mothers' and eight 'fathers' before enlisting up with the Royal Air Force as a Boy Entrant at the age of 15 and a half. On this occasion, my guardians were Aunty Kit and Uncle Jack Speight, and their grown-up son called Reg. They also owned a rather large dog called Rex who was to become my best friend and constant companion.

Uncle Jack worked in the Woolwich Arsenal making washers on piecework. I remember him showing me a few of these washers, of which he had to stamp out some 20,000 per day. He was so proud of them. I asked him what they were used for, but nobody had told him. It was a government secret.

In Rockmount Road opposite to our house was a couple of very large houses some twenty feet above the road level, and fronted with a tall wall; this was on the junction of Grosmont Road. I was forever playing beneath this wall. On one occasion, when I was elsewhere, the whole wall collapsed bringing down tons and tons of masonry and garden rubble. Today, this plot is occupied with a tall block of flats.

At the bottom of the road stood a large house where my friend lived, can't remember his name. He suffered from polio, which meant he had to have leg irons. He had the largest supply of comic books in the universe, and he always lent them to me.

It was down the steep hill that I learnt to ride a bicycle. I recall it was a giant machine with no crossbar and rather dubious brakes with no cables or gears. Astride the frame, I just let gravity takes its course. Four doors down, I was lying in the gutter with more scabs on my knees. We kids were hard back then, I just remounted and rolled down some more. By the time I had reached the bottom of that hill I could free wheel. Before too long, I had mastered the pedals, and then my horizons spread; I could now explore the Bostall Woods, where I knew for a fact that Dick Turpin was still in hiding. I hadn't actually seen him for myself, but some of my friends had, and so I knew it to be true.

I was sent to the primary school on Purrett Road. I recall that there was a tall brick wall between our playground and the road outside. Being on a hill, the school was built at two levels, and there was a tall wall separating the Infant and Junior playgrounds.

My form master was a Mr Bannister, and his wife was also a teacher there. These teachers were real heroes, and totally dedicated.

On some special day in 1949, in preparation for a visit to the school by some VIP, our class

was taught to recite a Psalm word perfectly. 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.' Psalm 24. Even fifty-five years later, I can still remember it word for word. I suppose I should do, as Mr Bannister smashed the old 78rpm record over my head, in fun, when it was all over! (It didn't hurt me a bit).

Our school class was offered the chance to go on an outing to see a ballet in either Plumstead or Woolwich. It was called Coppelia, and it was to cost each pupil two shillings. There was no way that I could raise that sort of money, but as if by some magic, a tick appeared against my name showing that I had paid. Was it Mr or Mrs Bannister who had settled my account? I would never know.

What I do know is that when I rushed home and told my aunty Kit and uncle Jack that I was going to see a ballet, and that I didn't have to pay anything, they immediately accused me of stealing money from them. I was given a real hard thrashing. I still had marks on my face and arms the next day when I went back to school, and Mr Bannister asked me how I had come by them. I lied – but he could see through me like a sheet of glass.

It was thanks to that wonderful teacher that I passed my eleven-plus, and was given a place at Bloomfield College on the other side of the Common. The school motto was 'Zeal before Honour'. Sadly, after six weeks there, I was moved on to another aunty and uncle in the Wirral in Cheshire.

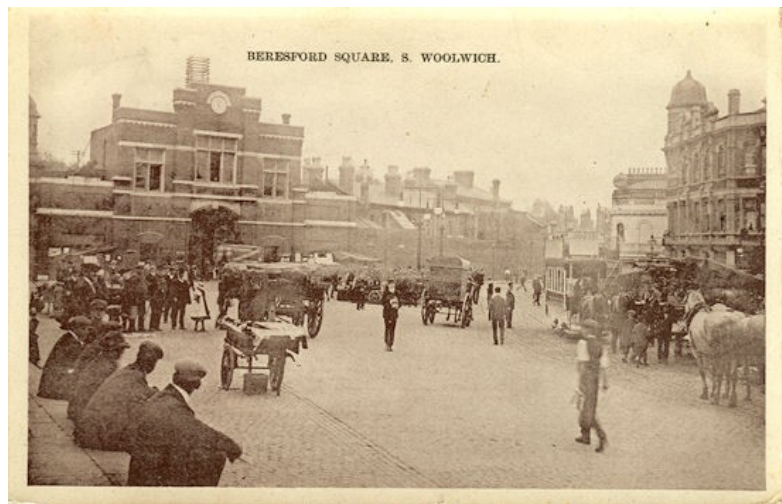
Plumstead Common was my country, and I was king. With Rex, my faithful companion, we fought dragons, explored strange new lands, and knew all of those secret places that only children can find. A smooth pebble in a puddle is worth more than diamonds and rubies, and you can make a bow and arrow out of any old tree. OK, so my backside was showing through the seat of my pants, and I had pieces of Kellogg's cornflake packets in my shoes to block the holes up, but one day, I would be very rich.

Do you know something? I never felt poor. I lived on pease pudding, baked beans and dripping sandwiches, and apart from always suffering from boils on the back of my neck, I can never remember being ill. But, oh, those damned boils kept coming back, and the treatment was far worse. Because we couldn't afford the 'Kaolin' poultices that the posh people used, I was regularly administered bread poultices. When my aunty Kit put the poultices on my neck, they burnt my skin. 'Sit still!' she would say, 'It doesn't work unless it hurts you.'

I also learned very quickly to answer the question, 'Have you been?' with a resounding 'Yes, aunty.' If there was any doubt, I would end up being forced to drink a tin mug of Senna pods. Then I would go!

I remember that if I walked over the crown of Rockmount Road, on the right-hand side, there was a broad flight of steps down to Wickham Lane. At this junction stood one of the old fashioned telephone boxes where you put in tuppence, and pushed buttons A, and B to get your money back if the call was unsuccessful. Somewhere, I had learned that if you pushed cotton wool up the coin slot where the returned pennies dropped, then the coins would get jammed. It was quite easy to return some hours later, pull the cotton wool down, and collect those pennies. I suppose this was the equivalent of fishing, you just never knew what you might catch.

On Saturday mornings, I would walk up the Plumstead High Street to the Market, past the Public Laundry and the Library. I seem to remember that the Public Baths were also there. The laundry was a bare concrete room full of steaming coppers, enamelled sinks, and lots of loud-mouthed ladies. It seemed to be quite a social event.



The market was always full of stalls, and I can remember seeing the 'World's Strongest Man' bending iron bars with his hands, and balancing a cartwheel on his chin. It was here that I developed my criminal career a stage further, for my favourite trick was to crawl along the pavement to below a greengrocer's stall, out of his sight. When I was beneath his stall, I would stretch my arm upwards, and steal an orange. Well, that was the idea, but sometimes I would end up with a pomegranate or an onion. One day, as I stretched up my arm, a much larger hand grabbed my hand and hauled me up off the ground. 'Right, you little thief, now I've gotcha!' I immediately went into defence mode, and burst into tears. He let me off with a severe warning.

In 1951, there was an event that reached the four corners of the Empire, 'The Festival of Britain'. Now, I couldn't afford to go in legally, but I did manage to get somehow (I forget my method of entry, but it probably involved tunnelling beneath the perimeter fence somehow). There I discovered the most wondrous things ever. The Pylon dominated the entire exhibition, and the Guinness Clock kept me for hours waiting for things to happen. I distinctly remember something like a metal wire man coming out on a bicycle every hour, and water jets soaking those spectators who were not as careful as they might have been.



How did I get up to the South Bank? I must have walked. Everybody walked back in those days. It wasn't a case of walking outside of your front door and hopping into your car, you either walked, cycled or took the tram.

It must have been about 1952 when the last tram went up the Plumstead High Street at midnight. I remember being allowed to watch this historic occasion. By the time the tram had turned the corner at Abbey Wood and was heading towards Shooters Hill, it was already being stripped of souvenirs. Mind you, for a couple of years the trams had been supplemented with trolleybuses. They were wicked things! You couldn't hear them coming down the road, not like your grating and clanking trams. Another thing, when the tram arrived at it's destination, the conductor had to swing the electric contact arms around with a large pole, and the kids were allowed to throw all of the seat backs into the reverse direction. You couldn't do that on the trollies!

Once I decided to run away from home. By using my ill-gotten games at the telephone box, I jumped on a tram, handed over tuppence, and asked the conductor to take me 'all the way'. Heaven knows where I ended up, but it was near a golf course. I had eaten my corned beef on crusts sandwich' on the tram, so here I was, nine years old, no jacket, just a holey pullover, holey shoes, and facing life in the raw. There was no princess to meet me and take me to her castle. Eventually, a kindly gentleman heard my story, put me back on a return tram, and gave me a tanner. (6d) Bless you, Sir, whoever you were.

For a few months, I was encouraged to join a boxing club up near where the Saturday market was held. I hated every minute of it. When I put on my boxing gloves I felt as if I was holding five pounds of lead on each arm, I wasn't really strong enough to hold my arms in a defensive pose. I can still recall the constant smell of sweat everywhere, and huge thugs pummelling hell out of the swinging punch bags. They wanted me to join the junior boxing team; I wanted to stay well away.

The Woolwich Free Ferry was another day out for penniless kids. It was a fair walk for me, but you could sail the seven seas for nothing. The only snag was that when you reached the other side, you were not allowed to stay on the boat for the return trip, you had to dash off the boat, run up the exit ramp, run down the entrance ramp and reboard. Then you could continue your fantasy dreams, perhaps of being the well-known Plumstead pirate, feared by landlubbers and sailors the world over.

One real luxury for us was a day trip to Clacton or Brighton. I went twice, my Uncle 'Arry had a truck that he used as a freelance building contractor, and once every summer, he would take us out for a ride.

I recall an event at the old St Nicholas Church cemetery. About 1950, some people broke into a crypt and disturbed the Victorian corpses. They opened up a lead-lined coffin, removed the corpse, and stood him up against a wall. The newspaper described him as having a thick head of red hair and well moustached, being rather handsome, and within a short period of time, he simply disintegrated with the exposure to the air. Whether the culprits of this crime were ever discovered, I have no idea. I sometimes used to play in that cemetery.



*The old Woolwich Free Ferry approach road ramps, south side.*

One mystery that I could never solve was who was the 'bag lady'? Every resident in Plumstead probably knew of her, yet I never met anybody who knew her name. She was only a short lady, and wore a dirty old mac that went down to her ankles. She also carried lots of bulging bags as though she was shopping for a family of ten. She didn't so much walk as waddle. Rain or shine, you could always find her walking up and down the Plumstead High Street. Where was she going?

In the late 1980's, I made a return visit to Plumstead, but it had all changed. The roads were busier, cars were parked everywhere, and the housing developments had taken up all of the old empty sites. Television aerials were sprouting off many of the roofs, and the place was full of strangers. I could never return to my childhood memories.



# *Profile Of A Plumstead Common Resident:*

*Julia Cowdell*

## **Irene Crompton, born 1935**

Irene Crompton's mother, her sister and she herself were all born with the congenital condition osteogenesis's, which meant being confined to wheelchairs. Irene's father was in the army but her parents separated when she was thirteen. As a result the family was terribly hard up. They moved to 16 Kirk Lane in 1949 but found the house too small to accommodate three wheelchairs and in 1951 had the opportunity to leave there and live in a much larger house, 110 Plumstead Common Road named Gordon Cottage, (presumably after General Gordon) where Irene has lived ever since. The house was in a very bad condition. For a start there was no access from the front because that entrance was for other tenants. Irene's uncle made a gateway from Kirk Lane and widened the side door (tradesman's entrance) to make it accessible for the wheelchairs. Over the years, the tenants having left and her uncle and aunt having moved in, her mother slowly got the house to rights, encountering all sorts of problems such as three tons of glass dumped in the back garden - the previous owners having been builders - which she dealt with by getting the Boy Scouts to build a rockery. She found a great builder, Quinnell, who was very helpful regarding payment and has worked on restoring the house from time to time ever since.

Schooling was a huge problem - no school would take Irene and her sister. Her grandparents taught the girls to read and her mother, a woman of tremendous courage who lived on her wits, wrote to the London County Council (LCC) about their plight. By an amazing coincidence, the Chief Inspector of Special Schools met with a retired teacher on a train travelling to Glasgow and told her about the two wheelchair-bound children. She said she would teach them, and so she did, travelling from her home in Dulwich each Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The girls learnt from her from the age of eleven to eighteen. In addition they had dressmaking and typing teachers who came to the house. The LCC supplied the best equipment - books, sewing machine, typewriter - which they were allowed to keep when they finished their education. The teacher lived to be a hundred and two, so the experience apparently did her no harm!

Having been educated, the next major obstacle for the girls was to find employment.

Nobody would employ crippled girls. Initially they lived off social security until eventually they started to pick up some work making wedding and bridesmaids dresses from home. They then continued to work from home for Remploy, an agency that employed disabled people. The only work available, however, was repetitive jobs such as folding greeting cards and making padded Christmas cards; the padding was scented with cheap perfume and when Irene opened one she discovered it was full of bed bugs! They sewed hooks onto army bandoleers and stitched round the top of blood filters. They also made clothes brushes with squares of rubber and twine – soul destroying work which made their hands bleed. They were then offered military embroidery but told “it blinds you in the end!” They learnt how to make the embroidered peaks for field officers' caps by winding gold wire round cardboard risings until it looked like material. The pay was about six and eight pence for

each cap, which took roughly two hours to make.

When the work from Remploy came to an end they telephoned numerous firms, of whom about four were interested in them, one Hobson's, (still going strong) employing Irene to do military embroidery for the next forty-five years. By coincidence, this was the company her grandmother had worked for, making Sam Brown belts for the army. Her mother and aunt also worked for them, together with other local ladies including some Indian women. Over the years they could demand more money because there were only very few people doing such work in the country. They embroidered peaked caps for many famous people - for example, Prince Charles (for his Investiture), Lord Mountbatten, Captain Mark Philips, the King of Jordan and King Constantine of Greece. Finally the military embroidery work all went to India. None of the firms Irene worked for sent her a letter of thanks for all those years of service when she retired aged sixty five.

Irene remembers that Plumstead Common Road was quite well to do when she was growing up. There were several doctors and army officers living in the road. Doctor Dark, at Holly Cottage, had a horse and cart; his man (Inkpen) lived at Ivy Cottage, both houses in Plumstead Common Road. Irene has always appreciated living opposite the Common and remembers the Bandstand with affection, although she says that some of the performances were poor quality variety acts and very amateur. Apart from the military bands, which were excellent, there were children's shows, such as Punch and Judy, and pretty awful talent shows. The loss of the bandstand and the demolition of St Margaret's Church were traumatic events, but Irene feels that at least the Common itself is better cared for today than in the 1970's and 80's.

For all the problems of living with a severe disability, Irene regards herself as having been very fortunate and she has a strong religious faith. She was part of a devoted family and although her beloved mother and sister have been dead for many years, she has been sustained by that devotion ever since. She feels a tremendous sense of gratitude towards her mother and also her remarkable teacher, both of whom, against all the odds, were responsible, in large part, for Irene having been able to earn her own living and make a life for herself. As well, she has always felt herself to be part of a real community, Plumstead Common, in which she is still actively involved.

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



# *Recollections Of Plumstead And Woolwich*

## *1930's - 1950's*

*Gordon Coton*

I was born at the Woolwich Home For Mother's and Babies in June 1930.

Between the years of 1930 to 1937 we lived in Burwash Road, Plumstead.

I was a very sickly baby and I had badly twisted legs, probably owing to rickets. Mum told me that grandma wouldn't allow her to take me in the pram into their house in case I died there!

I was about six or seven when mum was having a birthday party for one of us three kids; I can't recollect who it was for, but she reckoned that every kid in the neighbourhood turned up. They turned up with old book covers, torn comics and all sorts of things as presents; it was all they had to give; some came from poor families. Mum would have filled them up with plenty of food and drink though, as they were spilling out into the front and back gardens.



*Beryl, Gordon & Edna Coton c.1934.*

I went to Foxhill Primary School from the age of seven. This was when we moved from Plumstead and nearer into Woolwich, to 1 Willenhall Road. Foxhill School was situated in Nightingale Vale in those days. Cyril Bull was the Headmaster. Woe betides any boy who was caught in the street not wearing his school cap by Mr Bull. I enjoyed wearing my cap as it proudly displayed our school badge, depicting a white fox on a black background. Us boys used to go to a sweet shop at the bottom of Foxhill and we could buy half-penny bags of sweets in which you might find a piece of cardboard, if you was lucky, as it entitled you to your money back. Another type of 'lucky dip' was a board that had lots of small holes drilled in it. You'd choose a hole and with a nail or matchstick push a piece of rolled up paper out of the hole and unroll it to see if you'd won a pennyworth, or more, of extra sweets. Our own corner shop was situated on the corner of Foxhill (now part of Plumstead Common road) and Elmdene Roads. It sold just about everything you needed; a kind of general store.

Another thing I remember was on our way to school and back we used to pass a house that had a high fence around it with a hole in it that we kids used to look through. My two elder sisters had a look first, as I used to have to give them a bunk up to the hole. When it was my turn to look through a dog on the other side jumped up and bit my eyelid. There was lots of blood and it looked terrible; my mum said that she could hear me screaming from the top of the road right down to our place!

Another time, an older friend was giving me a ride on the carrier of his bike when my legs got caught in his back wheel spokes and that made quite a mess of my legs!

So, as I mentioned, in 1937 we moved from Burwash Road to the other side of Plumstead Common, to Willenhall Road. This was more towards Woolwich Common, but Plumstead Common remained our favourite playground. It was from Foxhill School that we were evacuated to Hawkhurst in Kent when the war broke out in 1939.

When the air raid siren warning sounded I remember all us children were led down to the lowest rooms at Foxhill School. They were situated below the school playground level. When the big guns up on the Woolwich Common opened up the noise was tremendous, to such a degree that the windows of the room we were sheltering in all blew open with the force!

I remember going to the Globe Cinema to see Judy Garland in 'The Wizard of Oz'; that was



*Evacuees with Gas Masks await the train journey into the unknown.*

around 1939. Behind the Globe and in the park there were concrete seats built up on rocks. Beside them was the Band Rotunda and near that was a war memorial, to the fallen of the Great War 'WWI'. This memorial was a large stone cross and on the back there was an embossed swastika. To us kids we thought it very strange indeed, remembering that this was at the very time when Hitler's Nazi Germany and its swastika were much-hated symbols. But this was in fact the old good luck symbol, which represented life. The Nazi swastika, which represented death, was a reversal of this good luck symbol.

Two pubs I remember on Plumstead Common were the Ship Inn and the Old Mill. Our family would wander over to the Ship on fine weekends; it was our families' watering hole for many years.

Up until 1939 things were going along quietly, until the outbreak of the war. Things changed then, as the coming hostilities threatened London and its suburbs. This was when us kids were evacuated.

I remember the train stations on the way up to Charing Cross were crowded with hundreds of parents and kids, all milling around; all in their best clothes. There we got on another train that took us down into Kent. Charing Cross was absolutely packed with mums and dads and kids, all yelling and hollering. We all had our wee cases and gas masks and a large identity label tied around our necks. As I said, we all went down into Kent; I went to a place called Hawkhurst, my two sisters went to Sandhurst, which was just a few miles further on. I was very lucky 'cos I went to a baker's and confectionery shop that made all kinds of cakes etc. Remember that this was in 1939 and before rationing came in. I had a marvellous time there; in the bake house they had huge troughs that they put the kneaded dough into overnight for it to rise. When the bakers went home at night I used to take off my shoes and socks and climb into a trough with the dough and play and build all sorts of things with this wonderful soft and malleable stuff. In Later years I often used to think about the folk who

unsuspectingly ate the bread made from this dough that I had so happily played with.

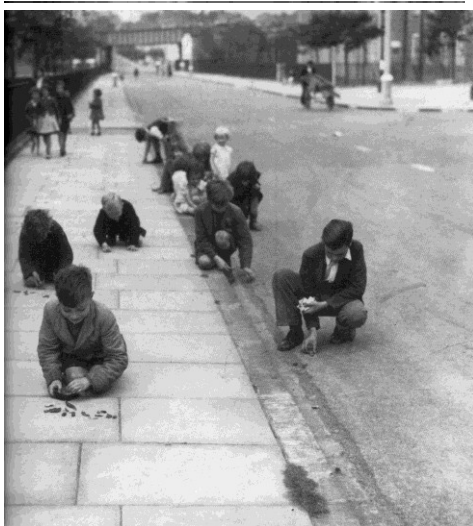


*Inside an Anderson Shelter.*

By now the war was gathering momentum. The German planes would follow the Thames up into London to do their business. As they returned to go back home they would drop any remaining bombs onto the villages in Kent as they passed over them, in order to lighten the aircraft, plus they would often strafe the villages. I personally only heard this happen a couple of times, as most bombs fell wide and into the fields, killing some animals. When our mum heard about this practice she came and got us, telling us "That if we are going to go, (get killed) then we'll all go together" and took us back home. I had been away from home for about a year at that stage.

We actually went back when the Blitz was raging, especially over parts of east and south London. So we would spend all our nights sleeping in the shelter. Our shelter was an Anderson shelter, built in our back garden.

It was a four-man shelter. When they were delivered, out the front of the house, a six and a four-man shelter were left there. Our next-door neighbour took the six-man, yet there were only the two of them. We were left with the four-man shelter yet we had our nana and granddad plus our family of five, but we managed. Granddad was out doing his ARP (Air Raid Precautions) work during most of the war. Dad built a blast wall in front of its entrance. Folk often grew plants and things on the roofs of the shelters, as they were half buried in the ground.



*Children collecting shrapnel after the previous nights air raid.*

For me though, as a kid, these were very exciting times. Raids were, to me, big firework displays! As kids we would scour the streets during and after an air raid and pick up the pieces of shrapnel. We had tin hats around the house that we put on. This shrapnel, that had rained down during a raid, was great to find and to swap. The shrapnel came in all shapes and sizes. If you found a piece with writing on, either in English or German, it was considered a whole lot more valuable than a piece with nothing on it. Shell caps and base plates were worth a fair bit more too. Another thing we looked for were incendiary bombs! When the Germans dropped them they were in a large canister. We called them Molotov Breadbaskets. The breadbaskets would split open in the sky; as the incendiaries dropped it was like a brilliant sheet of light. They were dropped in great numbers and there

were always a number of them that failed to ignite. We would find these duds and they were very collectable. As a matter of fact, when I decided to emigrate to New Zealand in 1954, I didn't think that the New Zealand Customs would have particularly liked one of these

incendiary bombs coming through their customs, so I buried my last souvenir, that I still had all those years later, in dad's vegetable patch, at our old house. I often wonder if it was ever dug up or if it is still buried in the garden?

During raids I used to feel almost sorry for the German pilots when they were caught in a cone of searchlights; these were set up to spotlight enemy planes. The planes were like a moth caught in a torch beam. They'd dive and jiggle around until they got out of it or they were shot down; if they dived and disappeared we hoped that they had been shot down. On Woolwich Common there were lots of anti-aircraft gun batteries; on Plumstead Common I can recall the Barrage Balloons. The Artillery used to put quick-firing Bofors guns on the back of three tonner army lorries. These drove around the streets of Plumstead and Woolwich, firing off at planes every now and again. When they fired the guns near your house they were incredibly loud and the vibration from them would often damage and crack the ceilings and plaster in the houses and would often break windows. Then they'd drive off and open up again somewhere else.

One particular day, mum and us kids went down to Beresford Square shopping. When the air raid siren went we took cover in the basement of the Equitable Buildings and were there for most of the day. This was when the London Blitz was going on and Jerry was bombing the docks, factories and warehouses and setting everything on fire. Huge fires burned, lighting up the sky. The Arsenal was also very heavily bombed and many fires were raging in there too. They then returned at night, guided to their targets by the fires. So, as I said, we were there most of the day taking shelter. The costermongers', who had their stalls in the market, would run back and forth to them, when ever they saw any thing coming down, whilst all this mayhem was going on, as they still had to try and make a living.

Later on, around mid-1943, things quieted down for a while, as our fighter planes started to take command of the skies. Later still, though, there was a resurgence in the bombing and we were evacuated once again. This time we were sent up to the Midlands, but it was only for about six months. As things started to quiet down once again, we all came home.

Later on, when the doodlebugs, 'the V1 flying bombs', started coming over, was when I started work, as a boy of 14, in 1944, at the Royal Artillery Institute, which was an Artillery Officers' Academy, on Woolwich Common, as an apprentice printer. So we didn't get evacuated again. Fortunately, for me, there was tons of work about at that time because the men were away fighting, or they were needed for skilled work in factories and other important jobs. What brassed me off, though, was that most of my mates went into the building trade and were earning about seven pounds ten a week, compared to my meagre seventeen and six a week! They would be doing heaps of overtime, as they would be repairing buildings. Jerry would then come along and bomb and blast them again. Mum got

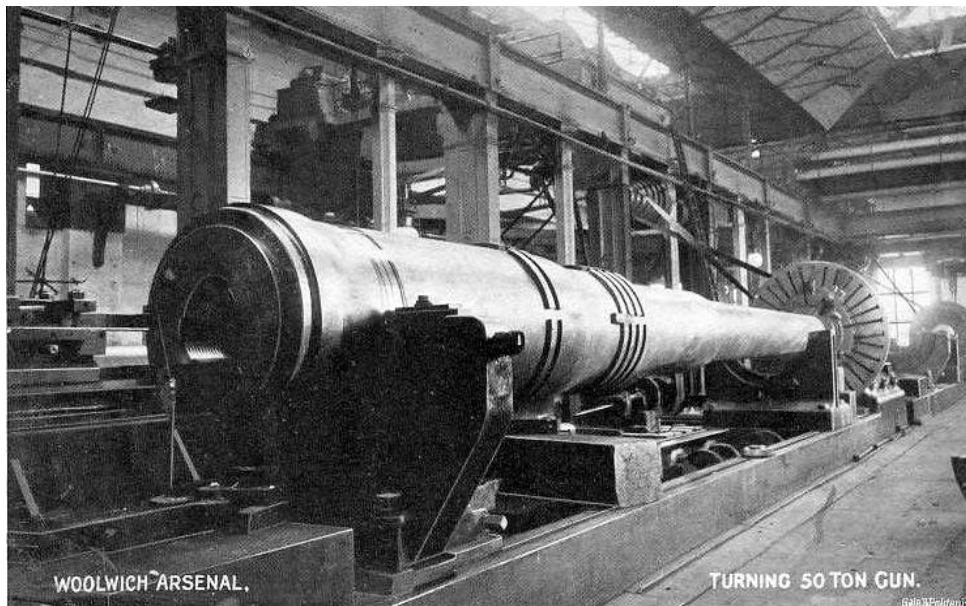


*Smoke from the fires after heavy bombing raids.*

ten bob a week and I had seven and six left to spend. My mates, on the other hand, had about two quid a week to spend. Now two quid a week was a lot of money in those days.

As I said, I started work when the doodlebugs were starting to come over; that for me was the most frightening thing about the whole war. The reason was that when you could hear them coming they were going like the clappers and they carried on and you were then safe. But, often, the motor would cut out and then they would glide over. If they were in the clouds you wouldn't see them until they came out of the clouds and could appear to be heading straight for you. One day, I remember, it was a very nice day over Woolwich and Plumstead; my family, all five of us, were in the garden and we saw this doodlebug, only about 200 feet above us, but it was still going very fast. We could plainly see the flames coming out of its exhaust. It roared over the top of us and it carried on and eventually crashed, we found out later, into the docks. I reckon that if I'd had a catapult I could have hit the bugger!

When the doodlebugs died down we then got the Rockets, 'the V2's'. The thing with the Rockets was that we had a philosophy, that said, "If you heard a Rocket explode you were OK, but if you didn't hear it you were dead anyway!" The thing was that you heard them explode and then you heard them coming. This was because they travelled at supersonic speed, travelling faster than the speed of sound. So when they hit the ground and exploded the sound of the rocket engine would then 'whoosh' in. I reckon that the doodlebugs did more damage than the V2 rockets. This is because the V2's plunged into the ground on impact and then blew up, but the V1's blew up on the surface, thus causing more blast damage. A friend of our family was lying in bed with the curtains open, when she saw a 'red pencil line in the sky'. It was a rocket; it missed her house and landed on the house next door, killing a family of five. The blast caused a lot of peripheral damage.



During the war there was a lot of rationing. I remember mum used to get dehydrated cabbage; I called it 'green coloured brown paper'. I've never enjoyed cabbage since that stuff, nor, for that matter, carrots either, 'cos they also told us they fed carrots to the night fighter pilots and the bomber crews as the carrots improved their night vision. This resulted in just

about every spare patch of ground growing carrots and we sure got our fair share of them!

When VE Day (Victory in Europe) arrived we had some big street parties, which were held out in the street on tables set out in rows, during the Victory in Europe celebrations. (VE Day)

Dad worked in the Arsenal for the duration of the war and he, thankfully, didn't have very far to go to work on his bike.

I remember the huge crane situated in the Arsenal. It was used to lift the massive gun barrels onto the barges moored on the Thames. They were then transported away and fitted onto the big battle cruisers and some were also installed on the coast to shell across the English Channel.

These huge barrels were drilled out on lathes, which took months to accomplish.

One of these coastal guns can be seen on Woolwich Common and next to it is one of the 16" (about 41 cms) shells that it fired, standing four to five foot tall and weighing about a ton and a half!

One day, in 1946, a group of us youngsters went along the sewer pipe, that runs alongside the Plumstead Marshes, to see what we could find for souvenirs. One of the group had borrowed his brother's bike, without letting him know. His brother reported it stolen. We were inside the Arsenal's fence picking up all sorts of shells and cartridges, as this was where they used to test the projectiles. If some of them didn't explode they were just left there. We had collected quite an assortment of stuff and had it piled just outside the fence to take home, when the local copper came to see us about the bike that was parked by the fence. He called out to us. But then, when he saw what we were collecting, he told us off and told us to put the stuff back. We did this by tossing it back over the fence! He never said a thing: whether it was because he was paralysed with fright I don't know. But this, in hindsight, was



a very stupid and very dangerous thing to have done, because, if one of those things had exploded it could have killed the lot of us!

*Munitions Workers at Gain's Filling Factory, Danger Buildings, Woolwich Arsenal, 1917 during WWI.*

In the Arsenal there were the Danger Buildings. They were big buildings, well separated from each other. The roofs were specially constructed, built with

loose slabs of concrete, so designed that if a building blew up by accident, or was bombed, these huge loose concrete slabs would blow off, enabling the blast to go up and away from the neighbouring buildings, thus preventing a possible chain reaction of explosions.

People who worked in the Danger Buildings could be identified by the colour of their hair and faces, which were a yellow colour. This was a reaction from the chemicals used in the filling and fusing of the projectiles on which they worked.

The barrage balloons dotted around the Plumstead and Woolwich areas sometimes broke their cables and you'd see them float up into the sky, higher and higher until they were a tiny speck and then disappear. They would eventually burst under the pressure of the altitude. If they were shot at by the German planes they usually burst into flames. However, if they were damaged by falling shrapnel, or they developed a leak, they would deflate slowly and then they could be a menace, as their cables dragged across roofs, bringing down chimneys and slates alike. When this was likely they would bring out the Home Guard and get them to shoot at the balloons, so as to deflate them and bring them down much faster. This also gave the Home Guard some firing practice.



*The weekly tin bath wash.*

At home we had a scullery where mum had to light a fire under the copper in order to heat the water for washing the lothes. We had a tin bath which hung on the back garden fence and once a week we had a bath, whether it were needed or not! However it was in front of the living room fire. My two older sisters bathed first and then me, being the youngest, in the same water, topped up occasionally with hot water.

On Sundays the cockle and winkle man was out and about selling his wares. He rode a three-wheeler bike with a large square container at the front, chilled with ice. He would call out, "Winkles, cockles, shrimps..." There were also the

greengrocer with his horse and cart and the ice-cream man, on his three-wheeler bike too.

One time I gave the greengrocer a hand. I worked for him all day and he only gave me sixpence when we finished, so I never worked for him again after that.

Occasionally there came the knife grinder and sometimes the tinker, who mended your pots and pans for a few pennies. I also remember the gas lamp lighter man who used to come round every evening on his bike carrying his hooked pole with which he would turn the street lamps on. In the morning he'd be back to turn them off. Then there were the Frenchmen who came across the channel to sell their onions. They would come to your door with strings of onions around their neck and also around their bikes. Gypsies also came round selling their handmade wooden clothes pegs, small bouquets of lucky heather and also wild hedgerow flowers. They lived off the King's Highway by Plumstead Common. Most mums, to buy the kids clothes, also used the tallyman. It was very common in those days for him to be seen going around with his big suit case full of stuff.

During the war when we went shopping, if mum spotted a queue she'd put one of us kids in that queue; if she saw another queue she'd put another kid in it until we had four queues covered. When she saw what folk were queuing for and it was something we needed she'd take our place in the queue.



At that time there was a lot of shortages of things and so you had to try to get what you could when you could. We were lucky in as far as we had an uncle who had a butcher's shop in Powis Street. I remember mum once saying that we had eaten horsemeat one day and whale another! But I often wondered in later years; where did she manage to get whale meat in London in the middle of the war!

On Saturday mornings we'd go to the pictures near the ferry terminal. After the pictures dozens of kids would roar across on the ferry to North Woolwich and run back again through the tunnel and then back on the ferry and do it all over again! By this time the crew on the ferryboats were ready to climb the flipping rigging! I think it was tu'pence or thrupence to get into the pictures. One of the picture theatres had an annual birthday cake that they had cut up and give a piece to each child. There would be hundreds of kids at this special do, however, when we got our bit of cake it was only as big as a kid's little finger!

I believe three of the ferryboats were sent to Dunkirk to help in the evacuation of our trapped troops. The ferries all got back safely, although they were shot up and were full of holes! *\*See footnote.*

Us kids would get up to the usual mischief, like putting 'apenny bangers into milk bottles, blowing them up! Knock Down Ginger was also popular with us kids. (But, I suspect, not with the unfortunate folk we played it on.)

We occasionally played in Bostall Woods and I remember the prefabs on Winn's Common, built to house some of the bombed-out folk from the Plumstead and Woolwich areas. These 'temporary' homes were there for many years after the war, as Britain struggled to build itself up again after the devastating and massively expensive war.

Mum, who was born in 1900, remembered the horse drawn trams that were driven along Plumstead High Street and into Woolwich. I myself remember the double-decker trams that used to cut through Beresford Square and into the surrounding suburbs.

*\*This became a common story, but in fact it is incorrect. No ferries ever were involved in that great armada of ships that went to Dunkirk.*



# *Remembrance Sunday At The War Memorial*

*Julia Cowdell & Ian Yarham*

A ceremony of remembrance has been held at the War Memorial on Plumstead Common since the 1920's. At one time hundreds of soldiers could be seen marching across the Common to the War Memorial and there were still soldiers from the 1st World War attending up until the early 1990's. These days there are fewer and fewer former soldiers [from the 2nd World War] attending - there were only four in 2003 - and increasing numbers of 'others,' including the Scouts and local residents.

## **Julia Cowdell 2004**

"It had always been my son Kenneth's ambition to play the Last Post on Remembrance Sunday. He is a Scout with the 8/15th Woolwich Scouts who meet at St Mark's with St Margaret's Church on Plumstead Common. On Sunday 12 November 2000, a few days before his 12th birthday, he achieved his ambition when he twice played the Last Post on the trumpet. The first time was in the church itself, just after the two minutes' silence, and half an hour later he was asked to play at the War Memorial to the 8th London Howitzer Brigade. The former soldiers of the Kent Artillery Volunteers Association stood to attention while he played before they were dismissed. Then Kenneth was given a round of applause, which was very moving for him."

## **Ian Yarham 2001**

"The strains of the trumpet were heard in Blendon Terrace. Drawn by the evocative sounds of the Last Post, I hurried across to the War Memorial to witness the ceremony but sadly arrived just as the gathering was dispersing. It was the first time in my memory that the Last Post had been sounded at the Memorial and it seemed very fitting in the millennium year that it should be played by such a young trumpeter."

## **Julia Cowdell 2001**

"The Last Post at the War Memorial [November 2003] went well, despite heavy rain as we arrived and just after we finished, but it held off while the ceremony took place. I always think the trumpet sounds so haunting out in the damp November air, and the old soldiers appreciate so many Scouts now being there. One of the Scouts laid a wreath for a second year alongside two of the former servicemen, and this was my son Kenneth's fourth year playing the Last Post up there."

## **Ian Yarham 2004**

*Thanks to the Plumstead Common Environment Group for their kind donation of these stories.*

# *Reminiscences Of Alan Forrest*

*Alan Forrest.*

**Co. Leitrim, Ireland. 2006**

Greetings from Ireland! I spent my childhood in Plumstead Common during the late 1930s. My family owned the greengrocers shop in "Birds Nest Hollow" for many decades. I remember the first box of bananas coming into the shop after the war, and my father giving the whole lot away to the local kids who had never seen one!

My childhood memories of the Common come flooding back as I remember the old Globe cinema, sledging at the Slade Ravine and breaking my arm whilst playing on the Air Raid shelters opposite the Ship public house... happy days!!

Just after the war I was a choirboy at what was St Margaret's Church. I remember well the vicar, Mr Morcombe, a lovely man. I remember heady summers on the Common, and especially the film shows from the back of a lorry just below the bandstand, the summer concerts there etc. I also remember the wonderful community spirit amongst the local people, when everyone knew everyone. In those days graffiti and vandalism were unknown.

My sister Mary married the publican's son, Tony, from the Ship. They moved on to be the steward and stewardess of Shooters Hill Golf Club. My mother's family, the Smiths, came from the Slade (Albatross Street).

I would love to know if anyone might just remember my family!!



*Birds Nest Hollow, Plumstead Common Road, 1930*

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

# *Reminiscences Of Bert Hooper*

*Albert Richard (Bert) Hooper*

I was born in 1945 in Plumstead, grew up on Sladedale Road, and emigrated to Canada in 1968. During my few visits back home I became very disheartened at the 'Cancer Of Uncaring Attitudes' that had taken over the maintenance of both Plumstead Common and Rockcliffe Gardens. I like to remember the days of paid council gardeners, no budget restraints, and respect for all public space.

As a child, the Common was my world. We played with grasshoppers in the dry summer grass behind the paddling pools. We'd go over the Common in the warm summer evenings and see hedgehogs searching for food. A huge rook nest high in the trees on Winn's Common was a sight that has stuck in my mind forever, not to mention my encounter with a badger one evening in Bowman's Hollow, near the steps to King's Highway.

On our way to church at St Mark's we often fed the few ducks that came to the Slade Ponds.

We watched in horror as the big storm in the late 50s caused so much damage there because of all the garbage that clogged the inadequate outflow grate.

The Common was my escape from a crowded house, my place to think about where I might go in life, my place to watch nature in all its glory, and my place to look out over the Thames and see the funnels of the Blue Star ships and wonder about the magical places that they would sail to.

That wonder about 'Ports of Call' led me to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, where I have lived ever since. My love of 'The Great Outdoors' has directed my life to the east of Vancouver, to the Fraser Valley, and Maple Ridge, tucked up against the Golden Ears Mountain. Our home backs directly onto a GVRD Park (Greater Vancouver Regional District) and we can see the Kanaka Creek flowing down to the Fraser River, in the ravine below.

My ability to enjoy the free things in life that nature provides, understanding the natural growth cycles that sustain all of life forms on this planet, I believe I owe mainly to my early days of living near to and experiencing the pleasures of Plumstead Common, Bostall and Lessness Woods, Shooters Hill and the marshlands of Abbey Wood.



# *Reminiscences Of Colin Singleton*

*Colin Singleton, Ph.D., M.A.*

I was born in St Nicholas Hospital, Plumstead, in July 1937 and lived in Conway Road until I went to sea in 1953. I went to Conway Road School and from 1948 travelled by train to St Olave's Grammar School in Bermondsey every day. My wife was born in the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies in Woolwich in 1939 and lived in Nithdale Road for about 15 years. She made a daily bus journey to Haberdashers Aske's School in New Cross.

My mother, who died in 1998, lived in Conway Road and went to 'The Brown School' [Kings Warren] from July 1922 to February 1928. Then, like many girls from the school, she worked in the Royal Arsenal. Her School Certificate was signed by the Headmistress, Helen Bartram. We have some of the school's magazines ranging from January 1923 through to March 1935. The 21st birthday issue of September 1934 has a photograph of Miss Bartram, a rather motherly looking lady. At the 21st birthday service in St Mark's Church, the Bishop of Woolwich remembered the school's first bricks being laid when he was a curate at that church. In the late forties, peering through the school's railings, we were fascinated by its bomb damaged East Wing.

My memories of Plumstead Common are from the years 1945 to 1953. The Vicarage for St Paul's Anglican Church stood at the top of Griffin Road on the west side, where it joined Waverley Crescent. The church, in Hector Street, is now St Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, I think. From the top of Griffin Road outside the vicarage there were magnificent views across the Thames and the Royal Docks to the mysterious lands of Essex. We had no car and didn't travel much in those days. So that view, which always included funnels of ships belonging to famous companies like P & O, Union Castle, New Zealand Shipping Co. and Royal Mail Lines had something to do with me wanting to go to sea.

From the hill you could hear the clattering of railway trucks being shunted in the marshalling yard below at Plumstead Station, together with the puffing of the steam engines sending up white clouds of smoke. My family went to a nonconformist chapel in Vicarage Road. On some Sundays we met the Vicar of St Paul's coming, rather grandly, down Griffin Road and my father always walked us into the road to let him pass.

I remember the shell of a large house that stood on the southwest corner of Heavitree Road and Waverley Crescent. This had been bomb damaged and was a playground for the gangs of boys that roamed the Common. Such gangs sometimes hassled children playing in smaller groups on the Common.

In summer an ice cream man parked his barrow by the fountain where Warwick Terrace joins Waverley Crescent. I think it was a barrow with small cartwheels. I am sure that the ice cream was very yellow and cost 2d for a small cornet. The man always wore a white coat and flat cap. The fountain had metal cups dangling in its trough on chains. Were the cups made of lead? We always thought so.

My wife remembers 'Concert Parties' at the bandstand at 7.30 on summer Tuesday evenings. If they went inside the chestnut paling fence and sat on the green folding chairs adults paid

6d. You could sit on the seats on the terraces opposite the bandstand and see the show for nothing. I remember conjurers and ventriloquists at the bandstand in the summer holidays.

There were buses that started their journeys on the Common. From the Woodman the 54's and 75's went to Selsdon and Croydon. The 53's came from Camden Town, I think, and parked along Warwick Terrace, where there was a public lavatory with an outside tap. Here the drivers filled large watering cans to top up the buses' radiators and unscrewed tea plate size caps on the engines to do so. The drivers used a café on the corner opposite The Old Mill pub. The road surface where the buses parked was dark blue and smooth from their oil and tyres.

The Common in front of 'The Brown School' had a cricket pitch mowed in summer by a man with, I'm almost sure, a very large motor mower. At the end of a run he would swing his feet off the ground and push down on the mower's handles to turn it round and go back the way he had come. The plane trees that still surround much of the Common gave shade in summer for picnics with Marmite sandwiches. In autumn you could wade through dead

leaves filling the gutters, before they were swept up by men with their green small-wheeled barrows with enormous rubber tyres.

*Links RACS shops 1960.*



When we married, in 1960, the reception was in the hall on the first floor of the R.A.C.S. building at the Links, under the clock tower. It wasn't an attractive hall, brown paint, bare floorboards, but at the west end there was a stage. On this a small band of elderly men, engaged by my father-in-law, played loudly enough to make conversation impossible.

At the Slade there were 'the swings.' There I think, was the huge umbrella shaped roundabout that swung up and down as it went round. The thing to do was jump off at the highest point when it was going fast, making sure the lady in the green hut by the entrance didn't see you. If she did you risked being sent out from the swings altogether. There was another low roundabout. With this one, you and friends ran it round, faster and faster and then jumped on at maximum speed. The lady in the hut stopped you doing this if she saw you, but it wasn't a 'sending out' offence.

When I left Conway Road school in July 1948 I was told to choose a prize. I wanted the green mottled fountain pen, but so did a girl who I think was called Colleen Sturrock. The Headmaster, Mr Cyril Bull, persuaded me to let Colleen have the pen and so I took a book instead. Not very long afterwards Colleen was killed by a bus mounting the pavement in the dip outside the Slade [Greenslade] School.

Mr Bull lived in a house in Grosmont Road at the east side of Winn's Common. He was a big man who wore a dark blue chalk striped suit with a waistcoat and a watch chain. He often had a fresh flower in his buttonhole. He was a JP and we all thought his house in Grosmont

Road was very 'posh.' It had bay windows upstairs and down, superb views front and back and a large garden. Mr Bull had a car, which put him in the same category as the doctor we occasionally saw at her surgery in Conway Road. She lived in a detached house on the south side of Plumstead Common Road, almost opposite the Globe cinema. As far as I know, even the Vicar of St Paul's Church didn't have a car.

From Conway Road School the older boys sometimes would be walked up Lakedale Road to Winn's Common to play football in the winter. There were goal posts set up there on very stony pitches. It could be very windy and cold but there was a view to contemplate if the weather was clear. The prefabs were on Winn's Common at that time and I remember going inside one and being impressed because there was a fitted kitchen with a refrigerator and a bathroom. The prefabs were, in many cases, much better than the houses their occupants had lived in before.

Many of the things I remember are already described in 'Our Common Story.'*\*See foot note..* The boating and paddling pools at the top of Lakedale Road, the tea and sweets kiosk near the tennis courts and St Margaret's Church, in which I believe there was some kind of a memorial to the brother of my mother's cousin. He was killed in the First World War.

Many memories are personal, like visiting my grandmother's sister, Miss Annie Parkinson. She was a tall old lady who wore long skirts and a black shawl and lived in the almshouses in Waverley Crescent. She always produced digestive biscuits from a tin. Going through the iron gates onto a gravel drive you came to her front door on the left, with a knocker low enough for me to reach. She died in 1941 and is buried in Plumstead cemetery.

Perhaps some of this may be of interest, and there is of course much more....

*\*Editor's comments*

*\* Book entitled: 'Our Common Story' Published by Plumstead Common Environment group. First published 2001. 2nd edition published 2004. Colin Singleton. Brightlingsea. Essex*

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



*Ravine Pond today. (2004)*

*Photo: Alan Gibbs.*

# *Reminiscences Of Ida Reynolds (nee Williams)*

Once a week there used to be jitterbugging on the Common, towards the Bandstand. I can't quite remember, but I think the men used to play bowls there.

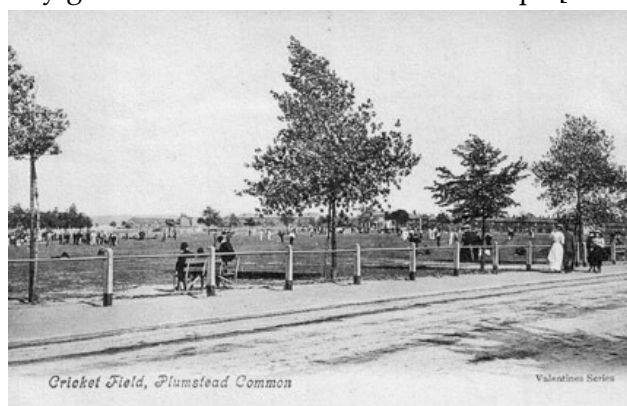
I also recall 22 July 1939, the day I married, we returned home from our reception at St Mark's Hall to find an air raid shelter delivered in the front garden, someone starting to play the drum on it. I recall also, when I was young, myself and friends were playing on fields behind Pendrell Street. We were actually catching tadpoles, when the R101 flew over. We were terrified, as it was very low. Someone had dumped an old bath there, it was on its side, and we all crammed into it, with fright. Apparently the plane was on its way to destruction, as it was that same night that it passed over Plumstead and fell to earth. The others I was with were, Eileen Mulligan, Paul Clarke, Mabel Sweeby, Elsie Holland, and Nellie Dorsett. I don't know if any are still alive; I'm 83 myself. (2001).

At the top end of Garland Road there were tennis courts. Opposite was the Co-operative Building and an abattoir. We used to see the lorries go past with the animals to be killed.

When the war came, one thing stuck in my memory: My friend's house got a direct hit, the bomb took everything down the crater, but her piano went flying in the air across the road and landed in Mr Robert's garden. He said, "Blimey, I thought they were coming down playing their harps!" That was in Pendrell Street, Plumstead.

I don't know if children still go sledging on the slopes in the ravine, but when we were young it used to be great, with everyone enjoying themselves on the slopes in the winter; we didn't have to go to Switzerland! I expect over the years it has altered very much. The lake in the ravine was kept clean; also there were lovely gorse bushes on one side of the slope [these are still there]. Everything looked lovely but I expect time has changed it all.

I lived in the big house at 2 Tormount Road until we sold after the war. When I first started work I used to get off the bus at the Old Mill, then cross over the 'cricket common.' One night there was a cricket match on, and I managed to stop the ball. It came straight at my head, but I was walking well away from the players; he sure had a whack at the ball, whoever was batting.



When you look back over the years we were very happy, especially during the war. An aerial torpedo bomb landed on a house in Garland Road, four doors from us. We lost the roof in the toilet and had other damage. It's silly now, but when we went to the toilet you still shut the door up, even though there was no roof!

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

# Reminiscences Of Lillian Baker

Lillian Baker, 2001

“When my husband, Claude Baker, was de-mobbed from the army after the Second World War, we decided that we would lease a small shop in Plumstead Common Road from his father, Lewis Baker. This shop, at 197, was just a tobacco shop then, so my husband decided to go to a toy wholesaler’s and we bought all the small toys that were reasonably price and dressed the windows with them. This was a great attraction because there were very few toys about, during the war.

We sold Hornby and Matchbox toys, which my husband religiously oiled every week. When Christmas Day came around he was missing for half the day because he had gone to people who had bought Hornby trains to help set them up.

We bought the lease in 1947 and traded until my husband died in March 1994. After about three weeks I opened up again as a memorial to my husband, because the shop was a great part of his life, but I could not keep up with the bigger stores, so I had to close in 1996. I still bump into people who say ‘Remember me? I used to buy my toys from your shop.’

During the time we were trading The Hollow was a pretty little village where everyone agreed that they would not sell anything that one of the other shops sold. Next door to us was a café, which was run by two Scottish sisters, Molly and Betty Waterman. Every New Year’s Eve they had a Hogmanay party with haggis and a piper, and around two minutes to midnight we all used to troop out into the middle of the road and sing Auld Lang Syne. Unfortunately, there was later a fire at the building and Molly lost her life; by then Betty had already died.

My husband and I were very happy living here and when he died I thought about moving, but changed my mind. I had the premises changed from a business into a private house.”

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



# *Reminiscences Of Mr & Mrs S.W. Green*

*Julia Cowdell*

Mr and Mrs Green were both born in Plumstead, in 1917 and 1913 respectively. After their marriage they lived in Plumstead Common Road, (No 79) leaving the area in 1943 after Mr Green, who worked on rockets in the Arsenal, was posted elsewhere. They have lived in Buckinghamshire for a number of years.

Mr Green, having received a copy of 'Our Common Story' writes:

"There are a few points to add: The Bloomfield Road Sunday School split from St Margaret's (over a new vicar, I believe!) and met in the Central School in Bloomfield Road. It flourished up to the war, having Sunday afternoon meetings and a 'Mutual Improvement Society',

which met, first in the Iron Room (Eglinton Hill) and later in the Friends Meeting House in Eglinton Road.



Connected with the Sunday School there was a Tennis Club, first meeting in Garland Road, later on newly purchased land opposite the back of Woolwich Cemetery (Timbercroft Lane, I suppose). Also there was a Badminton Club in the winter; all very active.

My wife insists I should tell you about the\*Hokey-Pokey man who used to have a stand opposite the Links Co-op on the corner of the Common. This was long before Walls ice cream. It was soft and very yellow and you had it with wafers.

There was also McDuffs restaurant nearby, where we had our wedding reception in 1940!! Both my wife and I have many memories.

\*Rhyme remembered by Pat Fawcett, born 1931:

Hokey-pokey, penny a lump.

Makes yer skip, makes you jump.

\*Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable states that hokey-pokey is an early form of cheap ice cream sold by street vendors [up until World War 2] and that it comes possibly from "Ecce, Ecce" (Look, Look) a cry used by Italian hawkers in London; others claim it is from hocus pocus, a magic incantation.

Hokey-pokey ice cream does not seem to be known in England these days; honeycomb is the nearest to it but can't compare to the little hard lumps that constitute real hokey-pokey. In New Zealand, however, it is a very popular ice cream and is often dipped in hot chocolate sauce, which instantly hardens. Biting into it is an unforgettable experience!

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

# *Reminiscences Of Mrs Sybil Simpson (nee Beavin)*

Aged 80, great, great granddaughter of Thomas Winn. (2000) Born in Heavitree Road and went to Ancona Road School and Woolwich Polytech. She left Plumstead Common at the end of the war.

“At the time I was living in the Garland Road area, there was a huge swing gate at the end of Swingate Lane, leading across the fields to Shoulder of Mutton Green and Welling. As teenagers, a favourite walk on a Sunday evening, after church, was down a little slope to the gate and over the fields, up Shooters Hill to Eaglesfield, down Shrewsbury Lane (which when I was a child literally was a lane, very muddy at times) and Plum Lane to Plumstead Common. We used to visit the Bandstand, and on Sunday evenings the bells of St Margaret’s Church would play a hymn, linked to the service, which could be heard right over by The Links. From Eaglesfield you could look down across the fields and see people gathering wheat and corn into sheaths and stooks, a practice that had been going on since biblical times, but is now gone forever. Both walks to Plumstead Common, and ‘over the fields,’ were popular with courting couples.

During my childhood there was an orchard behind the Who’d-a-Thought-It pub, towards Flaxton Road and Timbercroft School, at the end of which were three gypsy caravans, beautifully painted – an oasis of colourful life. They would sell goods and their children attended local schools. Street vendors were local characters and used to call out their wares: the muffin man, the man selling carbolic, and the shellfish man. Everyone knew everyone else; it was still very much country. At Christmas the \*waits would come round between

midnight and 3am singing carols.



At the bottom of Lakedale Road, near the fire station you would often see very sad sights during the Depression, around 1928-1932. For example, there was a man with no legs who drew chalk pictures on the pavement. He got around on a board with wheels. There was also a man with no arms or legs. He would be put on a chair, and sold matches. These were veterans of the First World

War. Of course there were no artificial limbs then.

In Woolwich during the thirties there was real poverty. At the market near Spray Street barefoot children, in rags, would be given whatever they needed by the stall holders who sold fruit, vegetables and remnants.”

*\* Waits were traditionally night watchmen and town musicians dating back to medieval times. They used to take part in local festivities and perform on special occasions including Christmas celebrations. The term ‘waits’ remained in use to describe carol singers and performers up until the First World War.”*

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

## *Reminiscences Of Phyllis Clarke (nee Fryer)*

Having read several articles in *The Mercury* (October 2000) about Plumstead Manor School, the Bandstand on Plumstead Common and the exhibition ('Our Common Story') at the Citizen's Gallery in Powis Street, I made my way there from Greenwich, where I live. To my utter amazement, as I was looking at different pictures, I noticed something about Waverley Secondary School, about the changeover which occurred in 1948. There were newspaper pictures of old school friends. I could name most of them, and most of the teachers too; memories came flooding back.

I went to a youth club in Nightingale Vale. On summer evenings we would meet up at the Bandstand and just sit there talking, having a fag, (we thought that was sophisticated then) or we would meet on the Common near the café. The 53 bus used to terminate there and the drivers and conductors would go in the café for a cup of tea and a smoke.



*Evacuees heading for the safety of the countryside WWII.*

I was born in Woolwich. My brother and I were evacuated during the war. He was five years old and I was three. Dad died in 1939, when I was three, so as we were the youngest, we were sent off to Devon.

After the war was over and we came home, we went to Burrage Road School. Then I went to Bloomfield Road (Woolwich Central). After a year there, we transferred to Ancona Road, which then became Waverley Secondary. By this time we had moved to Plumstead High Street. I used to walk to school, up Lakedale Road, past Beasley's Brewery. Big horses and carts used to pull the barrels of beer to the pubs. You would always see them on Thursday afternoon in Beresford Square market. It used to close Thursday afternoon (half day) and then it was hosed down. I don't know if they still hose it down now.

When I was fifteen I decided I'd like to have some pocket money, so with a few friends I

went to Woolworth's in Hare Street, Woolwich, and asked if we could have a Saturday job. The lady, Miss Kerwin, interviewed us and we were told to report to work the following Saturday, 9-6 o'clock for eight shillings. It was hard work but we enjoyed it. When the summer holidays came, I had seen a dress I liked in Wallis's, Powis Street for £1.19.11d. I asked the supervisor at Woolworth's if I could work for a week; she said yes. It was such a long week; I thought it would never end. But, at last, payday came and I got the princely sum of £2.00, so I was able to buy my dress in Wallis's. I only wore it twice; I didn't like the sombreros on it, so I sold it for £1.00 to a friend. What a disappointment!

I worked on and off for about a year. Still at school, I worked for the R.A.C.S. (Co-op now). Many people will remember the 'divi's' (dividends). When you bought groceries etc. you got a little paper ticket saying how much you had spent. Then you would take it to a little office where they gave you tin chits for the amount spent. After that they were changed for brass coins. You put them in twice a year, so twice a year I helped put the folded papers (saying how much dividend you had to come) into a window envelope. We received twelve shillings for that.



*Powis Street Woolwich 1950*

Whilst I was attending Waverley School I would sometimes visit my eldest brother and his wife and my two nephews who lived in Heavitree Road. There used to be pre-fabs there. They were so nice, with all mod. cons.

I have many happy memories of Plumstead and Woolwich. Going across to Victoria Park on the ferry boat [Woolwich Free Ferry], going to Saturday morning pictures for 6d. We were the Woolwich Grenadiers. I remember when Charlton Athletic won the F.A. Cup and I waited to see them come out of the stage door at Woolwich Granada. Sammy Bartram was holding the Cup. I could go on and on, but I will leave it there.

*Editor's footnote: Photos were added to this story.*

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

# Reminiscences Of The Globe Cinema

*Phyllis Townsend*

I remember going to the Globe Cinema to see 'The Wizard of Oz' and the manager coming on in front of the screen saying the sirens had gone off and would anyone like to leave. Nobody did. That was the 15th August 1940 and Croydon Airport was bombed; and when my sister Grace and I got home there was a very worried mother waiting for us. We did not realise that bombs had been dropped.

Wednesday the 5th June, again with my sister Grace: we went to the Odeon, Woolwich, to see 'The Road to Singapore.' The cinema had quite a lot of soldiers in it but it was not unusual in those days. When it came towards the end of the film a message went up on the screen for all members of the army to return to barracks immediately. It was just before Dunkirk and the battle of France was on. About three-quarters of the audience got up and started to leave. Obviously they had been told to go to the local cinemas and to be ready to leave - they would be on their way to France. The film had continued running and by the time they left the cinema the end of the film came up so we did not see how it finished.



*Martha McCarthy*

Born in 1904, she remembers that at the side of the Globe Cinema were two or three seats where she and her friend Gertie, aged 15 or 16, spent time courting with their 'soldier boys.' Gertie married hers, but Martha did not. On being asked if the boys took them to the pictures as well, Martha said they didn't have much money; times were hard.

*Thanks to the Plumstead Common Environment Group for their kind donation of these stories.*

## *Rita Ashby (nee John) Recalls*

I lived in Keemor Street, Woolwich until about 1956, having moved there as a baby. I went to Eglinton Road Primary School and then King's Warren Grammar School, Plumstead.

The house I used to live in at No 33 Keemor Street was one of the first to have electricity and a proper bath. In about 1953 the whole of the front of the house fell out into the road and I remember there being a tarpaulin hung to cover the front of the house. When it happened, I remember hearing a dreadful crash and my grandmother thought at first that a picture had fallen off the wall. When she saw what had happened she sent my aunt, in her dressing gown and curlers, to the police phone box on Woolwich Common, to report it.

My grandfather and aunt worked in the Woolwich Arsenal and also in an establishment on Woolwich Common that was a bit hush hush. I still don't know what they did there. When granddad died in c1953 my grandmother received a letter of condolence from Sir William Penny.

Memories of those days include taking a bag of washing to the 'bagwash' in Nightingale place. I would then collect it the next day, damp and ready to put out on the clothes line. I remember taking the accumulator to the shop to be refilled. It was a glass jar with battery terminals on top and I had to be very careful in case any of the acid spilled out. My two boy cousins and I used to play on Woolwich Common after school and would often take potatoes, carrots and onions to bake on a bonfire. I vaguely remember there being great heaps of earth dumped on the common and old what, I can only guess, were old air raid shelters.

I have many happy memories of Woolwich and Plumstead.



*Woolwich Common Barrack Field.*

# *Rita King Story*

*Michele Jewell*

As told to me by my aunt Valerie Woodgate (nee Stone) and my father George Stone, children of Lilian Sculley.

My aunt thinks this happened around the pre war years of 1936-37.

"Rita King became part of the family connections after my grandmother Lillian Sculley and great grandmother Ethel Stone stole her from a neighbouring garden. The woman next door used to be a baby minder. One day they could hear a baby crying in the adjoining garden. They peered over the fence and saw a very small black baby in a pram, looking very neglected, and wet and in much distress. They were outraged, so my nan climbed over the



*The photo is of her and my dad, George Stone. They both look about three years old.*

fence, took the baby, handed it to Nanny Stone and climbed back over. They washed the baby and gave her some milk. They then made up a bed for her in a drawer (a common practice in poorer families in those days).

It was then that Ethel King popped round for a gossip. Well, when she saw the baby she said, "Can I have her?" It turned out that the baby's mother was a nurse, who had got pregnant and needed to continue to work, as there was no help in those days - hence the childminder. The mother agreed to allow the baby to be adopted by Ethel King.

Ethel also had her own children, and she suffered some prejudice at the time, and then again, later on

during the war, because nasty-minded people thought that she'd been straying with one of the American troops. There were very few black people in this country before the Americans arrived, so I suppose that was a natural assumption to make. I never saw a black person, other than Rita (who I didn't notice was any different from anyone else) until I was about seven. When we were in South Africa, I showed some friends a photograph of your (Michele Jewell) leaving party (you were then only a little girl) when you all first went to Australia. In the photo, and clearly part of the family, was Rita (looking very glamorous). This caused some shock and I was asked who "the kaffir" was. I said she was my cousin and it caused great astonishment. Actually, I don't think we are related to the Kings, but Rita was always part of the family. Rita went on to become a dancer.



*Ethel King and George.*

So that's the warm and intriguing Rita King story.

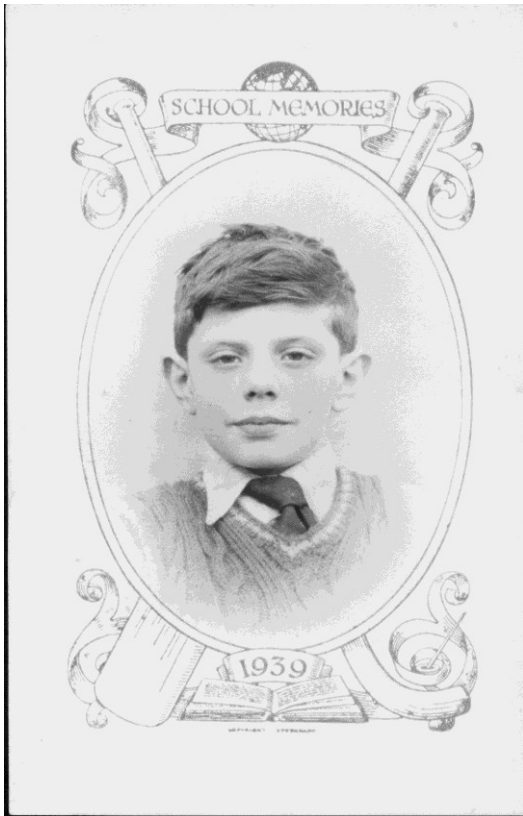
I am not sure which of Rita's parents were coloured but apparently only one was. First my aunt told me Rita's mother was from the West Indies and was pregnant by a white man, and then she said it the other way round!!



## *Ron Bramble's Recollections*

I was born at 39 Sladedale Road on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1930, so I was around for a bit of the war before going to Wales as an evacuee. I remember Chamberlain's announcement and the long uncomfortable times spent in the Anderson air raid shelter in the back garden. I can also remember the cemetery wall and several houses being "landmined" and cut down like a scythe. One of my memories of the earlier Blitz days was of a tyre or rubber depot, I think it was, burning in the North Woolwich area and the huge column of black smoke rising from there. One night, we had six or seven people crowded into our Anderson shelter because the family of a workmate of my dad had been bombed out by a landmine, (a huge bomb, capable of devastating large areas, which descended silently on a large parachute) and was sheltering with us until accommodation could be found for them all. In the mornings, during quiet periods, I used to scan the garden and immediate road areas outside the house to collect any odd splinters of shells, nose-cone fuses etc. (shrapnel) During one morning whilst I was searching, there was an air raid siren alert. I carried on for a bit longer until a Heinkel 111 zoomed close overhead!

I remember the red sails of the barges sailing majestically up and down the Thames.



*Ron, Conway School, 1939.*



*Dad and back garden home, 39 Sladedale Road c1930.*

In our back garden was a wooden shed, covered in tarred fabric in which my mum and dad lived when they were first married, just after WW1 when housing was as bad, in fact, possibly even worse than after WWII. The house at 39 Sladedale Road was my gran's place and I believe there were two other children of hers in the house at that time. So they got a new shed and erected it at the end of the garden. When I was a kid it was a great play area, it had two windows and was wallpapered inside.



*Gran in garden 39 Sladedale Rd.*



*My other gran with two aunts and mum.*

I have memories of going to see the collapse in Rockmount Gardens, which was a disaster of course. As a child I had been right through this whole area not long before this collapse, which was due to the mining that had gone on in earlier times in the old chalk mine and had caused the ground in the area to be badly undermined beneath it I believe.

*Mother:* "Now, dear, can you remember what I want, or shall I write it down for you?"

*Child:* "Oh, that's all right, Mummie. The most important thing is another tin of Mansion Polish for the Furniture."

**MANSION POLISH**  
 quickly gives a rich finish to Furniture and Floors. It is equally good for Coachwork of Motor Cars.  
**SOLD IN TINS.**

*Cherry Blossom Boot Polish*  
**BRILLIANT—PRESERVATIVE—WATERPROOF.**  
**Black in 1½d., 3d., and 5d. Tins.**  
 Also Selling in White, Brown, Dark Tan, Tonette and Deep Tone.

# *Royal Arsenal & The Light Rescue Squad Volunteers*

Chris Foord of the Greenwich Heritage Centre  
*on behalf of Len Thynne.*

I started my apprenticeship (1938) in the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, in the Carriage Department. (RCD). I had done a spell in the 'New Fuse' factory E81, then as a store boy in the RCD. It was good groundwork for what was to come. It was 1940 and I was in the second year of the Battle of Britain and a fellow apprentice named Ted Spencer, suggested that we cycled to the RAF fighter station at Hornchurch (not far from the north side of the Woolwich Free Ferry).

To get to the airfield meant going across a cabbage field; there was nobody guarding the aircraft. Because the Spitfires and Hurricanes were placed on the perimeter we were able to climb into the cockpit, the pilots had left goggles and gauntlets etc. in the open; I repeat, nobody was protecting the aircraft!

On the next visit, the Canadian troops were guarding the airfield, but they were complaining about being here to fight the Germans!

The next thing I heard about the Canadians was the battle for Dieppe! This attempt to land in France was a total disaster. This Dieppe raid was in 1942.

My early days in the Arsenal 'Royal Carriage Department' were spent erecting the 9.2-inch coastal defence gun carriage. Early in the war riveting was used to join all the parts of the carriage together. If you can imagine the noise in a confined space of the riveting hammers! It was not long before electric arc welding became the means of joining steel to steel. Labourers were recruited to do this work.

I attended the Woolwich Polytechnic to study for the English National Course (ENG). Because of the air raids in the evenings we had three, two-hour, classes on Sundays, mathematics, mechanics and drawing.

Most evenings were taken up learning St John First Aid. Doctor Remington (Woolwich Police Surgeon) was our tutor. Timbercroft Infants School, for the wartime, was used as a First Aid Post (FAP) and an Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) station. It will be remembered that the school children had been evacuated to the country, away from the bombing of the main towns.

My first introduction to the First Aid Post was when an alert was on; both AFS and FAP had squads on call, but, those not on duty were playing a badminton match against each other in the main hall on the AFS station. I received two pass certificates in St John First Aid.

We slept in two-tiered bunks in the classrooms. In the hall of the First Aid Post, on some Saturday evenings, a fireman named Duffield, would play the piano, so that we could have a dance. His signature tune was 'I don't want to set the world on fire'. The only person I know who is alive today is Olive Tarr, last living in Meopham. We never took any photos for

memory sake. Pity.

It was 1942 when we were asked to be Light Rescue Squad Volunteers. We were issued with dark blue battledress type of uniforms by the Woolwich Borough Council and were taught to drive some old pre-war London taxis, which had been retrieved from the Crystal Palace dump. They were the Beardmore type, with the gate change of gear; their main trouble was that the batteries were worn out. They were used to stow rescue equipment and I used one to carry injured people from a bombsite, at Smithies Road, Abbeywood, to St Nicholas' Hospital; a VI had killed six people on 18th June 1944. On Sunday mornings we would practise, on Barnfield Gardens bombsite, the method of lowering a stretcher with a volunteer strapped to it from the roof. This was to practise our knots and use of a tripod.

The two women in charge of the Timbercroft Lane FAP were Miss Wright and Miss Little. They were both qualified nurses. There was a daytime staff, who were mainly nurses and Conscientious Objectors (C.O's.) these were people who refused to join the armed services because of their religious or pacifist beliefs. In the evening we were on standby for first aid or stretcher bearing. We slept in the classrooms in bunks, one above another. We played badminton and Harold Tarr (Hank) became good enough to represent Kent, and he was the local men's singles champion. He was also an engineering apprentice in the Woolwich Arsenal.

Although there were many bombing incidents in the Plumstead area, the worst casualties were caused by the land mine that dropped on Alabama Street; it was 20th March 1941. At 8.45 that evening we were at a First Aid lecture, given by Dr Remington; the classroom being used was at the corner of Flaxton Road and Timbercroft Lane. When the window frames and curtains were blown in we knew we were needed. My aunt Nancy Thynne was killed in this incident. It was the night she decided not to use the Town Hall air-raid shelter that she bought it. It is distressing to know that not a piece of her was found. I was on the scene within minutes of the explosion as a first aider and stretcher-bearer. There were people calling for help from the houses on the right going up Cardiff St. The firemen were putting the fire out in the house opposite, (their job was to ignore calls for help) luckily, although the house was demolished, the occupants had been found sheltering under the staircase and were unhurt. They were sent to a Rest Centre. On proceeding to the site of the explosion, what with the calls for help, the smoke, dust and general confusion, the person we had on a stretcher, with a severe leg injury, had a delay, because the ambulance driver did not know where his ambulance was! The number killed was 23, and injured 42.

During the course of the war some of the First Aid Squad got called up. There was one chap who was in the RAF and he would look in of an evening. He mentioned that he was on a Pathfinder flight over Berlin. We never saw him again!

Uncle Tom was killed by a V2 rocket, he was a painter and decorator and was working on a house in Duncroft (a road off Swingate Lane). 13 killed, 87 injured. It was the 26th February 1945. (*See story: Ken Costin's Blast From The Past.*)

During the course of my apprenticeship I worked in the 'Heavy Gun Shop': this was where Naval guns were manufactured. I was asked if I would enter the breech end of a 15-inch gun barrel on a "skate board" to remove some burrs where the chamber meets the rifling. I was

pulled into the gun by means of a rope attached to the "skate board" from the muzzle end. When I had performed this task I had to be pulled out of the gun! George Pine called out, "It's time to go to lunch," leaving me stuck up the middle of the gun. I am pleased to say it was just a workshop prank, but not for me.

Another occurrence was when the newsreel crew photographed a young lady taking the place of 'Jarvo' Hyde, the skilled turner at the lathe, appearing to be the operator for 'propaganda' purposes. Guns I worked on in the Light Gun Factory were 4 inch Mk21, Naval Gun, 5.5 field guns and the 25 pounder.

An incident I recall: It happened midweek in the Arsenal. A bomb had dropped on the Tailor Shop; the girls who did the sewing had decided to work through the raid, (they were on piece-work) and consequently there were a number of casualties. We put a rather big girl on to a stretcher and carried her to the nearby "Edith Cavil" First Aid Post. I asked as to where I should take her. The reply was, "At the back with the rest of the stiff's". I had not noticed that her fingers had been cut off and no blood was seen.

It was Saturday 1st July 1944 at midday at the Light Gun Factory. Bob Wiltshaw and I had a look outside No. 1 bay when we heard a VI (buzz bomb) overhead. It exploded on an air raid shelter near the pipe fitters shop. About 30 yards around the corner the thick roof had collapsed on the people inside; many were killed. I saw a fellow with his brains exposed. We used doors as stretchers, it was carnage.

This week (6 July 2004) I was speaking to Harry Tarr who was working in D42 (Storehouse) when a bomb dropped nearby, severely injuring him and killing 23. He remembers a locomotive being thrown on top of a factory. He was transferred to Blackburn.

It was a seemingly nice quiet day on Saturday 9 September 1941, so we had decided Alec Bradley, two young ladies and I were to go to the West End to see a film. It was called "Champagne Charlie" with Tommy Trinder. Halfway through the show we understood there was a bombing raid and we could move back in the stalls to be under the circle for better protection. Little did we know that this was the day the Germans were going to try and blast London off the map. We got a train from Charring Cross but, at Maze Hill, we were told the railway line had been blown up, so we started walking. The others all lived in different directions; I managed to get to Woolwich Common, but was told not to go further because of an unexploded bomb. Later, I chanced it, walking through the length of Plumstead Common with a continuous rain of incendiary bombs falling.

A dud AA shell went straight through the Anderson Shelter and killed the lady living in No. 26 Ravine Grove. I lived at No. 30. The AA guns must have been pointing in the same direction because the top of Lakedale Road attracted a lot of falling shrapnel.

Towards the latter part of the war we were moved out of Timbercroft School to the council yard in Chestnut Road, and stayed there until the end of the War, as a Volunteer Light Rescue Squad (unpaid) for the borough council.

*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)*

# *Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society*

*Lorna Chudasama*

I have learned that in 1760 co-operative corn mills were built in Woolwich by dockworkers. The dockworkers objected to the high prices charged by mill owners who often supplied adulterated flour. Quoting from publishers Adam Matthews: "Woolwich features significantly in the history of co-operative action. The first Co-operative corn mill was founded there in 1760 (well before the births of Robert Owen (1771-1858) and George Holyoake (1817-1906), the founding fathers of the British Co-operative movement) and traded successfully for over 80 years. Less successful ventures included a Co-operative butcher's shop (1805-1811); the Woolwich Bakery Society (1842); a Co-operative Coal Society (1845); the Woolwich Co-operative Provident Society (1851); and the Woolwich and Plumstead Co-operative Society (1860). But these all showed that the idea of co-operative action was alive in Woolwich and paved the way for the establishment of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society [henceforth RACS] (founded in 1868 as the Royal Arsenal Supply Association, renamed as the RACS in 1872)".

My mother was looking at the postcard yesterday (24/4/2007) but didn't recognise it. She told me that quite often when they were living in the Army flats, she and her sister Winnie were sent to the Co-op to do the shopping. One day, on their way back with heavy bags, three young boys followed them and calmly helped themselves to the contents of the shopping bags. My mother and her sister were too frightened to do anything. They weren't scolded for losing the groceries but they were never sent again. Presumably the Co-op where my grandmother shopped was within walking distance from Artillery Place.



*Photo: Lorna Chudasama, from Postcard dated 1906.*

This lovely old photo is on a used postcard dated Dec 28 1906. The wording high on the Building is Royal Arsenal Co-operative Soc. Ltd and above shop fronts is the wording Butchers Department, Grocery & Provisions, Drapery & Hosiery. I haven't been able to establish precisely when it opened or its exact location in North Woolwich or whether indeed the building still stands. It would therefore not be the Co-operative Store where my grandmother shopped (with the disapproval of my grandfather, for whatever reason I don't know, but probably political) and valued the dividends.

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# *Sad Story Of A Little Girl*

*Story and photos from Louise Vernon, a distant relative of Winnie*

The little girl pictured is Winifred Mary Dillon. She was born 7<sup>th</sup> Sept 1907 at 25 Malton Street, Plumstead, to Sydney Wallace Dillon and his wife Catherine Emma. Winifred is pictured holding her dolls standing in the gateway to her uncle and aunts home in Wernbrook Street Plumstead. Their names were Samuel Hill and Mary Jane, nee Heasman (Dolly).



*(See photos on left)*

I would say that Winifred would be approximately aged three or four when the picture was taken. Which would date the photo at around 1910-11.

Sadly Winifred died on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 1913 of Tuberculosis Meningitis at Chiserly Field Side, Wadsworth, Hebden Bridge where the Dillon part of the family then lived.



*27 Wernbrook Street*



*Close-up of Winifred with her doll.*

# *Saturday Morning Flicks At The Century*

*Colin Weightman*

If you could afford it, Saturday mornings at the flicks was definitely the place to be. It cost 6d to get into the morning matinée show. You had to be aged seven or over to get in. I used to go along with my older brother sometimes, when I was younger than the age of entry. I remember being given my older brother's cap to wear, which was supposed to make me look older. I still remember how very nervous I felt at being found out as I paid my 6d for my ticket at the foyer.

Sometimes, as a bonus, the Manager stood in the foyer giving away free bars of Palm toffee to the first few dozen or so kids through the doors. I can't recollect getting one, but my mate Bert (Hooper) says that he used to get so mad when he'd see him with his younger sister Fay and say, as he gave them the one bar, "She's wiv you so ya can share wiv 'er! Move along."



Now if you were extra cunning, a mate paid to go in and he would then sneak behind the big 'black out' curtains. (These heavy black curtains still hung in front of each Exit door. They were used during the war years to prevent the theatre lights from showing outside at night, letting the enemy see a possible target to bomb.) Once positioned and hidden behind them you'd push the bar on the door; open it a bit; just enough to let your mates sneak in for free. Inside, hundreds of kids were all babbling loudly, filling the rows of theatre seats.

The best way to sit on these flip-up seats was on the edge of the upturned seat, in order to get a better view of the screen, unless you were in the front, as we were only small fry then. Some kids sat on the arms of the seats, with their shoes straddling the seats, but the ever-vigilant usherette lady with her big long silver chrome torch shone it at the offending child telling them sternly to "Sit down properly!"

These packed rows of kids came from all kinds of homes and were often from large families living in very cramped conditions, with overcrowded bedrooms and unhealthy living conditions. Fleas and head lice were quite common in these poor living conditions and children brought their tiny bloodsucker hitchhikers along to the flicks.

In those days local picture houses were colloquially named 'the flea pit' because of this reputation they had of getting infected by these wee jumping blood thirsty critters.

In Sid Blanche's story, Sid recalls during the early 1930's; "There was a Kinema, a proper old bug rush cinema at the bottom of Lakedale Road, next to the Red Lion pub. If we went to the men's lavatory, at the corner of the pub, we could wait until it was quiet; then climb the wall and drop into the lavatory in the cinema; wait until we could follow a customer out; and then take a free seat."

Also, in an extract from: Further recollections from Annie Day of Brewery Road, Plumstead, Kent.

Annie says, 'The local cinema she recalls: 'Saturday morning pictures, price 1d, known as the 'Bug Rush'. The polite version of the local residents was 'The Rush'. This cinema was situated on the corner of Garibaldi Street. Children of the 1950's referred to it as 'The Flea Pit'. On entering the cinema the children were given mint humbugs. When they all got tired of sucking them they used them as missiles to aim at the unfortunate pianist Mr Rowlands. The Ushers would come to the front of the cinema and threaten to throw out anybody who threw another one'.

These premises became Radio Rentals.

The Plaza Cinema (formally a church) later became the site of Woolworth's, in the High Street.'

In all honesty though, our local flicks was quite clean. I went to the Globe's Saturday morning matinée once and it was grubby and even more rowdy than our local flicks. Some of the kids had rubber bands and they fired staples at the big screen and it was peppered with tiny holes.

I remember when Tommy Steel told his recollections about his childhood visits to his local fleapit matinees. "The kids bombarded the organist with every thing they could get hold of, as he rose majestically up from the orchestra pit, gallantly playing a tune on the big Wurlitzer organ as he ducked and dived the great volley of missiles aimed at him". What a

way to earn a crust! Poor fellow.

At our local flicks the music was played from records. It would strike up when announcing Uncle Tom. He would bounce onto the stage and tell a few jokes and announce a few birthdays, along with the following week's coming attractions, competition winners and what have you.

Once when he was trying to speak the kids were being extra noisy, so he threatened to expel any one who continued to make a noise.

Now, my friend Ken was totally deaf; his mum paid for Ken and me to go to the pictures. This gave me a spare tanner (6d) to spend on other goodies. This particular Saturday, though, another friend, Robert, (Beacham) had taken Ken to the pictures instead, so I missed out on the extra tanner.

When Uncle Tom heard this child make a noise he immediately had him removed from the show. I looked across at these kids being evicted and saw that it was Ken and Robert. I thought, cor blimey, that was lucky for me as that could've easily have been me! Shortly after this I saw them both returning down the aisle and back to their seats, each holding a LARGE ice cream in a cone. It transpired later that when they found out that Ken was deaf and that he didn't hear the warning, they were each given a big ice cream each, to make up for the mistake of expelling them. I remember feeling very peeved about this, because I was the one who normally always took Ken to the pictures and reasoned, quite reasonably I thought, that it should have been ME enjoying that big ice cream cone. Life can be very tough sometimes, especially when you're a kid!

Packed with hundreds of rowdy and very excited kids at the matinee the lights would dim down, the background music faded away as did the noise from all the kids. The fire curtain was raised and very gracefully the stage curtains, beautifully lit up, were drawn open as the beam of light from the projectionist room flickered above our heads and the screen lit up with the first cartoon film, loudly accompanied with its familiar catchy theme tune such as, Bugs Bunny or Woody Woodpecker, all firm favourites, as the kids all cheered their approval.

When the kids' National Anthem was loudly struck up, the cheer went up as well, as this was the very popular, 'Night Riders In The Sky' song, sung so stirringly by, I think it was Frankie Lane, a top pop singer of those days.

As this song was cranked up on the speakers, his deep rich voice sang out those so familiar lyrics and, right on queue, us generation of baby boomers boomed out loud, in total unison, and with all the volume we could muster the words to the chorus, "Ghost Riders In The Sky." Gee, it sure stirred us kids up, one big loyal family.

This was only a warm up for much bigger things to come. The real action started when the feature films lit up the big silver screen and the heroes acted out their daring deeds. Such



*Colin and his mate Ken Daws.*

stars as the Cisco Kid or Roy Rogers and his horse Silver; Batman and Robin; the Lone Ranger and Tonto; Tarzan of the Apes and Jane, and so many more. We kids would get right into the action, all booing and shouting our anger at the villains, and then cheering at the tops of our voices, as we spurred on the cavalry or our heroes, with our hands and arms frantically waving and our bodies shaking and straining forward. Our faces would be contorted with scowls of anger as we continued to hiss and boo, and then in the very next scene we were cheering and clapping and shouting again, as each dramatic turn of events



*The former Red Lion pub, left, and the Century Cinema building on right, 2000.*

*Photo: Alan Gibbs.*

unfolded; all being acted out right in front of us. A child's world just couldn't get much better than this.

Then it was the much looked-forward to comedy films. Kids' laughter, so infectious, rolled in great waves throughout the theatre, as Laurel and Hardy or Charlie Chaplain, The Three Stooges, The Marx Brothers, Norman Wisdom and other comedians of the day did their wonderfully outrageous slapstick routines.

Later on, there would be a feature film such as 'Lassie Come Home'. The kids would sit enthralled, eyes wide with intense concern as the story unfolded; you would have been able to hear a pin drop, it was so quiet. Then, later in the film, when Lassie got so exhausted and weak, and she looked as if she was going to die, while the film's violin music played so softly, there wasn't a dry eye in the theatre.

Such were the treats that we Common kids would talk to our mates about at school on the Monday. Then, up on the Common, we'd act out our hero's role, doing battle; the 'goodies' against the 'baddies'.

# *Saturday Morning Shopping & The Underground Toilets*

*Jean Watson*

My family moved to Plumstead around 1959. We lived just off of Wickham Lane.

I fondly remember Saturday morning shopping trips with my mother into Woolwich. We would visit Cuffs & Co. in Powis Street, perhaps, in later days, we would visit Lyon's Corner House or the pie, eel and mash shop for lunch.

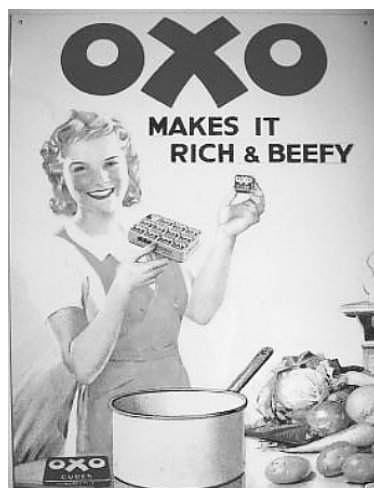
My school clothes were bought from the Co-op at the end of Powis street with the Co-op coinage (Tin money) or with Prudential cheques.

We sometimes walked down Hare Street to the old ferry approach and look in the window of the old coin shop there and then stroll along to the rivers edge to watch the ferry boats.

But I must admit that one of my favourite places to visit was the toilets just outside the main Woolwich Arsenal Gate in Beresford Square, situated opposite the high pavement where the sloping bus stops were (with the long railings that ensured you had to form an orderly queue). Just alongside there were steps that wound round, down below ground, to the ladies toilets. Once downstairs there was the most decorative tiling on the walls, with white patterned tiles, deep green and orange ones and, looking up, there were thick green tinged glass bricks that were built to form the ceiling. Through them you could see the shadowy outlines of the people as they walked over them and hear them chattering. I vaguely remember a see-through cistern in one of the toilets that mum told me had fish in! I never saw any fish but I always looked for them anyway. The toilets always smelt of that old red coloured carbolic soap!

We would wend our way homewards, stopping at Lakedale Road to buy cheese and jellied veal from David Gregg's for sandwiches, made with Wonderloaf bread and Summer County margarine.

Ah! Happy Days.



## Scenes Of Past Times.

Here are a few random photos that help to illustrate some of those earlier times.

### Shop scenes.



**Godwin's Bakers shop.** This corner shop shows how busy these bakeries once were. The shop windows are loaded up with all types and kinds of bread and cakes. Les Parkins, who supplied the photograph, says: "At sometime around 1920 my grandfather, William Godwin, ran a bakery. The shop was situated on Riverdale Road and possibly the corner of Speranza Street. It isn't certain how long he had the shop, but from other sources I think it may have been into the 1930's. The man in the picture, I believe, is George Taylor, the manager and his family standing at the shop door."

Interesting to read above the door 'Melox Dog Food' and also that they were 'Corn Dealers'.

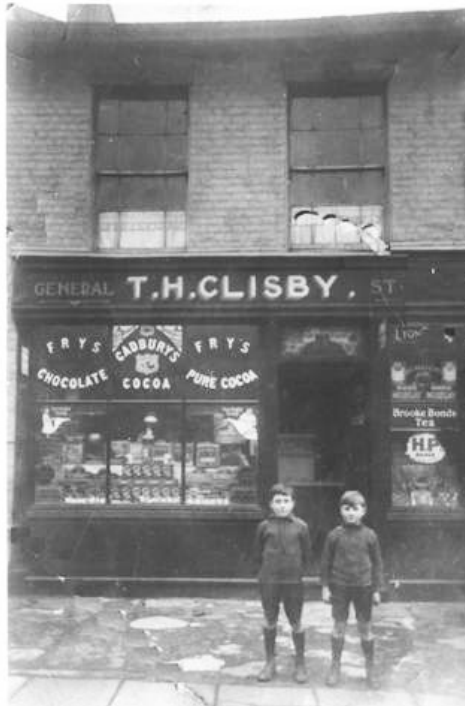


**Hooper's corner shop c1888.** This shop, seen here in late Victorian days with some of the children that attend the Cage Lane Mission just across the road situated on the corners of Lakedale and Brewery roads. The darker buildings, next to the two girls, were bombed in WWII and were totally destroyed. The open bomb site remained next to the shop there for many years after the war.



**Vizzard's second hand shop c1950's.** 168 Plumstead High Street. Harry Lane says: "I remember the shop well. It was quite near to the Plumstead Police Station and opposite the first house on the other side of the road, next to the wall of Bannockburn School. The right hand portion of a Petrol Station now stands on the site and was built in the early 60s. On the Police Station side of the shop was the old Central Hall which was also demolished to make way for the Petrol Station."

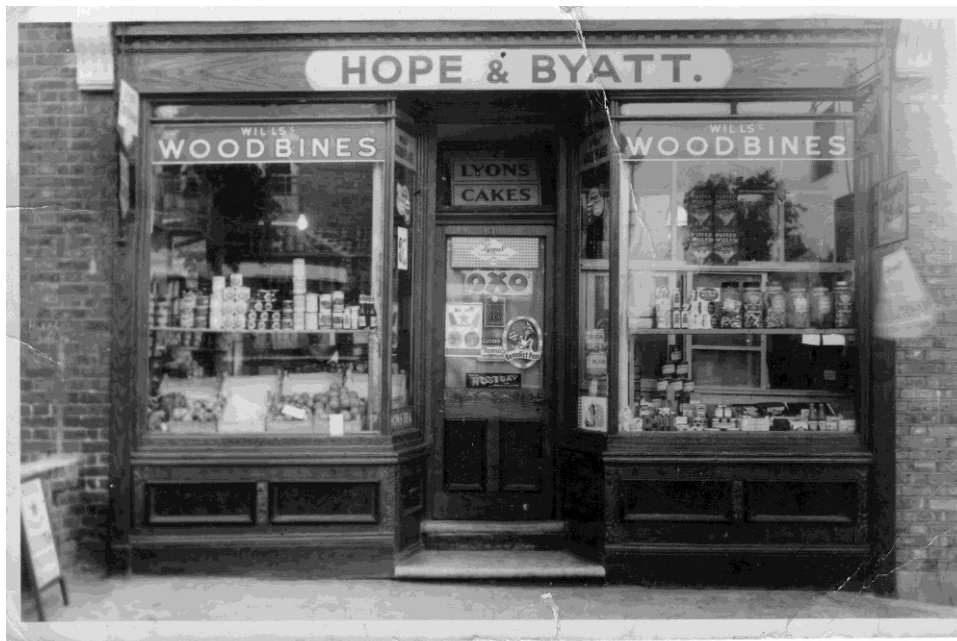
Roger Jewiss, who supplied the photo says, "Close by was the YMCA, in the Central Hall, which closed during my National Service (1956) and we were amalgamated with the Woolwich YMCA, up by the barracks.



**Clisby's shop. Plumstead, 1920's.** Janet Gardner (nee Clisby) who supplied the photo says, "This is my dad, Cyril Clisby and his brother Tom, taken outside the shop their parents owned in Plumstead in the 1920's. Unfortunately I am not sure where it was situated in Plumstead. Can anybody help?



**Stent & Linton, butchers shop c1900. 27 Powis Street. Woolwich.** What a large amount of staff shops had in those late Victorian times. Wages for staff was very low, as in most other trades in those days.



**Hope & Byatt shop. 1950.** Terry Byatt, who supplied the photo, says, "My parents (Philip & Anne Byatt) and grandparents (Percy & Grace Hope) kept the shop at 61 Bannockburn Road from the late 1940's until about 1955. I was two years old when they bought the shop, so many of my early childhood memories are around Plumstead. The shop was run during those hard times of post war rationing, as you can see from the photo, the shelves were not well stocked!"



**Charman Company shop. 1877,** corner of Lakedale and Tewson roads. A real 'corner' shop indeed. Note the two gas lampposts. The houses on the right of photo were in Tewson Road but these were all bombed and totally destroyed in WWII. And remained as a large open bomb site for many years after the war.



**Chapman's Bakers. 1900's.** This busy scene of late Victorian times shows their shop, situated on the corner of Griffin Road and Plumstead High Street, I have enlarged a portion of this photo to better show the detail of the some of the folk. Orchard Street is the next street on the left, 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. Picture kindly supplied by Helen Jones via John Boon.



*Closer view.*



*Blackler's shop, Plumstead High Street c 1900.*



*Powis Street shops. Another late Victorian scene.*

## People and Places.



*Card Family, at 84 Kirkham St. in 1918. Eliza Janet, daughter. Anne in uniform, her two daughters (Joan and Mary) and the young Charles Herbert Card, in his Scouts uniform.*

*Family stories have it that my great grandmother, either had a quick fling or was raped by a Sgt. from the Arsenal which resulted in her giving birth to a son in 1906. To have this child, Charles Herbert Card, she was sent to a home for unwed mothers in Hackney, where she gave birth. Upon returning back to Plumstead, her parents, John and Eliza, raised Charles as their son. Frances was only 16 at the time of giving birth. To this day no one has really been told who his father was. Charles grew up thinking that John and Eliza were his parents. Because they already had a son by the name of Charles, Charles Herbert was nicknamed Bertie.*

*The Card family lived at what was then known as 84 Kirkham Street, and later, when Frances married in 1918 to Alfred Perryman. It is stated on her marriage cert. her address as living at 63 Francis Street. Also showing that she was a Munitions Worker and that Alfred was a Farrier Sgt. living at AVC Barracks Woolwich.*



*St Mark's Plumstead Men's Club Walk 1923.*

*This was their Annual Walk, Easter Saturday, where they walked via the following route; Wrotham via Swanley, Farningham, Eynsford, Woodlands. Then Pilgrim's Way to Wrotham and back. Total miles =37.*



*Roger Jaques standing between his sister's June and Jacqueline c1948.  
(See Roger's story; In The Beginning... Plumstead.)*



*Sunfield's Football Club Plumstead Group.*

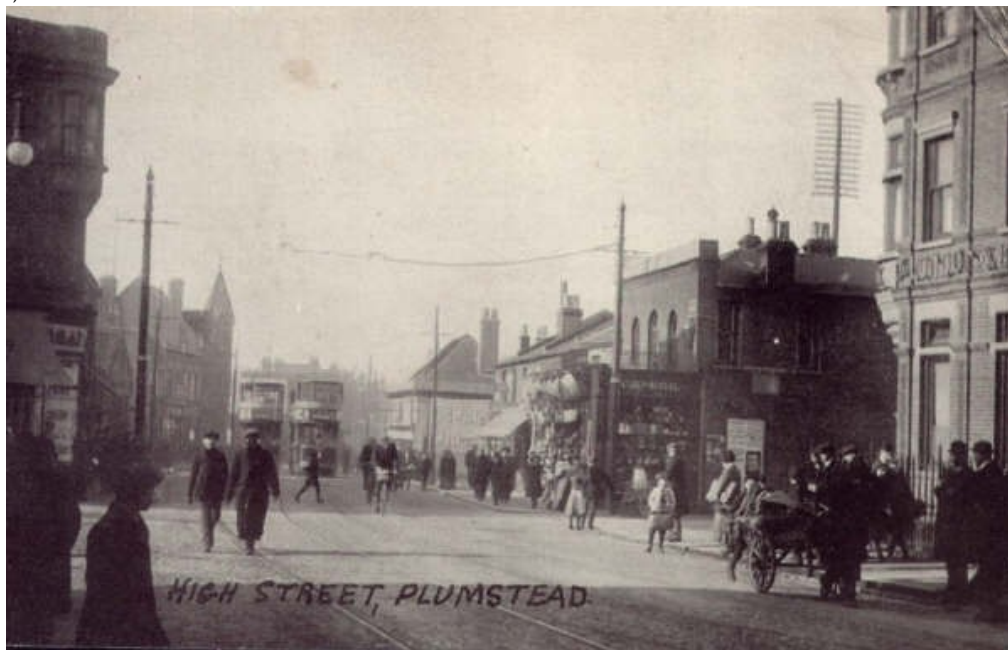


*Victorian children playing in Sutcliffe Road Plumstead, Late Victorian era.*

## Some Street Scenes



*Plumstead High Street, 1870. The workmen standing close to the heavy-duty scaffolding and by the gas lamppost, on the left, seem very interested in the cameraman taking the photo. Along the street from them, near the horse and cart, is the 'Red Lion Public House' with the sign hanging over the pavement. The road appears to have a dirt or sand surface. The road off to the right, by the gas lamppost, could be Heverham Road.*



*Plumstead High Street a few years later, Junction of Lakedale Road, during the Edwardian era. A busy street scene when folk walked or got the tram.*

*Photo: Lorna Wilkinson.*



*Griffin Road, 1880. The young Plane trees are just getting established in the late Victorian scene. Note the woman, on the left hand path, carrying a large wicker basket. I wonder what she was selling, possibly bread or fresh vegetables, maybe flowers?*



*Purrett Road two early scenes of around 1900. The children are possibly from the Purrett Road School.*

*Slade Ravine Ponds and Roydene Road.* Judging by the dress style of the folk enjoying the ravine's steep grassy slopes of this part of Plumstead common, I would say this is in the late Victorian era. Also the very small size and few amounts of trees would confirm this. Tree lined Roydene Road runs straight towards the intersection of Sladedale Road. On the left are the backs of the terraced houses as they ascend Tormount Road. In the distance a tall black chimneystack can be seen, which was part of the Brewery complex. To the right, behind the houses in Roydene, are the terraced houses of Sladedale Road and behind them those of Lakedale Road. An empty section of land between Roydene and Sladedale Roads is the 'Hollow.' ('oller). See story: 'Going Down The 'oller'.



*Raglan Road, Plumstead.* An early street scene, probably late Victorian era. Another horse drawn van can be seen on its deliveries round. On the left, next to the gas lamppost, is what looks like a fire alarm post, but I am not sure if they were in use that early. The building on the left would be the Raglan Arms Public House and in the distance is a large building, was it the school on Elmily Street?



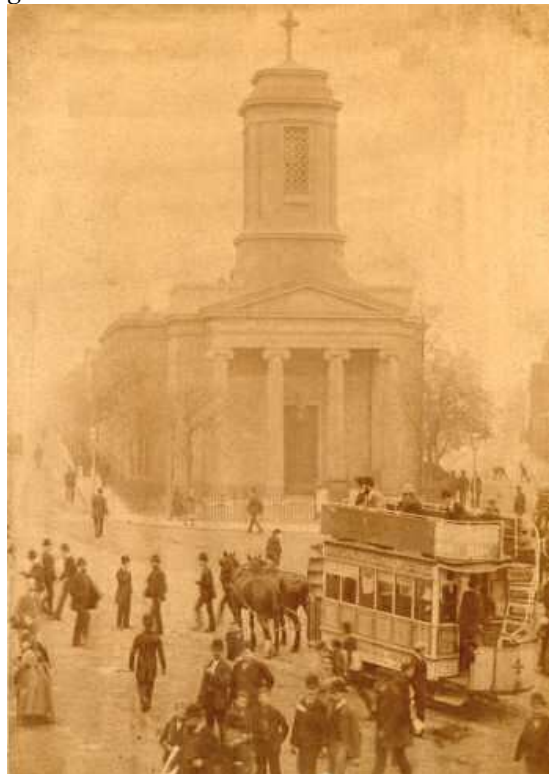
*Orchard Road, Plumstead, 1900. A busy delivery day for the heavy wooden horse drawn dray wagons.*



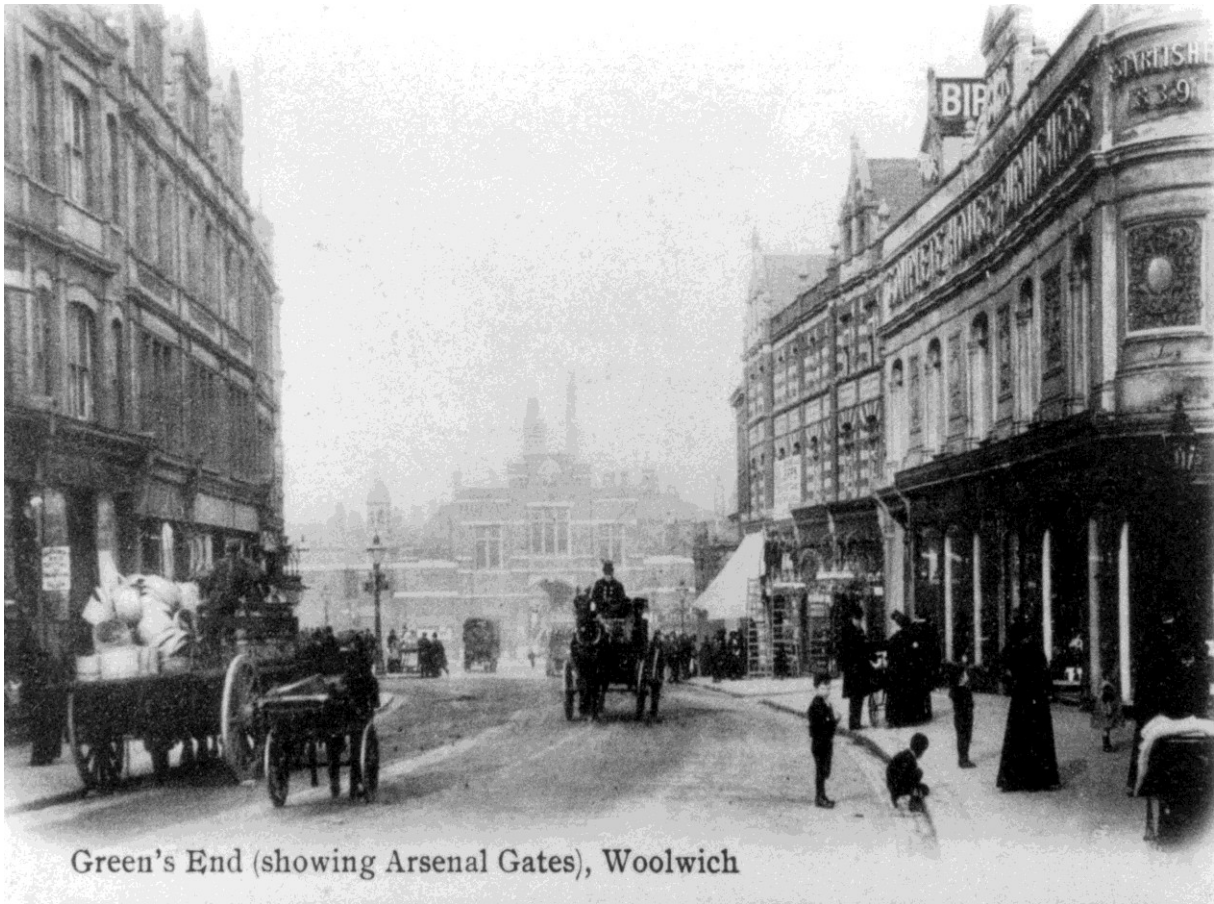
*Hare Street, Woolwich. 1920. A typical Edwardian street, with ladies in wide brimmed hats and that early delivery lorry. A 'Bobby' on foot stops, to give someone directions perhaps, on his beat. Plenty of other delivery vans as well.*



*Hog Lane, Woolwich. A very early photo, possibly taken around 1860-70 or earlier. A period when Victorian London was extremely poor, as was the state of the old dwellings that housed the people.. With very large families often having to share a couple of tiny rooms,, living and sleeping in very cramped unhygienic conditions with very poor sanitary conditions. The sign on the left, above the children, says 'Good Lodgings'.*



*Holy Trinity Church, Beresford Square, Woolwich, 1890. A busy Square with lots of people, all wearing some kind of hat, typical of those times. Many years later this 'land mark' church was demolished.*



Green's End (showing Arsenal Gates), Woolwich

*Green's End, Woolwich.* This is a nice street scene that shows Woolwich in Victorian times. A 'Hansom Cab' with the cabbie in his full buttoned riding coat and top hat. A delivery wagon stacked up with Baskets? And a hand cart trundling towards the Square and folk talking on the footpath.



*Plumstead, Bexleyheath, Welling open top tram, date unknown, probably during the Edwardian era.*



*Woolwich High Street, 1905. Plenty of street activity in this busy early Edwardian scene.*



*Woolwich. 1900's. These lovely old cottages were in the Woolwich Ferry approach road.*



*Plumstead Corner at junction of Plumstead High Street and Wickham Lane early 1950's.  
Photo: Mark funnel.*



*King's Highway cottages 1927.*

**Plumstead Gas Explosion 11<sup>th</sup> February 1907.**



**Gas Explosion Damage, Reidhaven Road, Plumstead, 11-2-1907, in the early Edwardian era.**  
*Photo: Beverly Bryant, taken she thinks by her grandfather William Driver.*

*The school children are gathered in front of the terraced houses that are badly damaged, many with broken windows as a result of the force of the gas explosion. It looks as if the man with the children is their school teacher, who has taken his pupils along from a local school for a closer, first hand look at the damaged scene.*



*Another view of the damaged houses pictured in this post card with caption dated 11-2-07.*



*High Street shop damage from gas explosion.*



*The Memorial Hospital, Shooters Hill, possibly in the late 1940's.*



The Water Tower, Shooters Hill

*Water Tower, Shooters Hill, from two angles.*

# *Sid Blanche's Story*

*Sid Blanche 2006*

I was born into poverty on 4th November 1926 in Parkdale Rd, where I lived with my father, who was often an unemployed labourer, my mother and six children, plus one lodger, all in three rooms. The fourth room was the front room, from which my mother took out the window and the room was used by her to sell chips from, at a penny a bag, to support us all because we couldn't get any help or money from the 'Relief'.

At 3 ½ years old all the poor kids were admitted to Conway Road play school pre infants. I hated it and hated school till I left.

Yes, indeed, we were poor but it was not so apparent at the time. I suppose that we lived in a neighbourhood where everyone was in the same boat. Many were, of course, much poorer.



*Sid aged about two in his backyard.*

One example was a neighbour who was in the Merchant Navy. He died from consumption, leaving a wife and five small schoolchildren who were poor even by the general standards of the day. The boys were school friends of mine and even as a small child it brought tears to my eyes when I used to go to their house in Barth Road and see the terrible, dire poverty in which they all had to live. Their mother, a young handsome woman, struggled very hard, but successfully, to keep her family together.

The alternative would have been the workhouse for the mother and council homes for the children, who may well have been fostered out. (We had a neighbour who fostered children from the council and her ex regular soldier husband used to beat them nightly!)

In spite of all their sad poverty, these boys would come out with us when we went out on Saturday nights having fun, when we would visit every shop, asking for their empty wooden boxes. We would then turn them into firewood to sell. The one great challenge was to open the door of the local undertakers, Messents, and call out, "Got any empty boxes, mate?" and then run as fast as we could!



*Sid with his sister Eve and his dad on a day trip to the seaside.*

Occasionally we could get the odd copper by selling these boxes direct to the better-off housewives. There were such people. The occasional childless couple, where the husband was, say, a policeman, or perhaps a postman, or maybe a tram driver. A job with regular wages and, as my dad would say, "even wearing out the bosses' clothes, instead of having to buy them".

When we did earn the odd copper, particularly on a Saturday night, we would visit Spittlehouse's. This was a stall erected around a device for cooking fish and chips. The owner used to save all the crackling from frying and we would be able to buy this at a farthing a bagful, after midnight when he ceased frying.

My mother was the 21st (twenty-first!!!) child of a very strict Roman Catholic family, so, despite our poverty, she gave us a halfpenny each for the church collection; we used to raid her large button box, pocket the halfpenny, which bought 6-8 oz of mucky sweets, and put the shirt buttons into the collection! We had no conscience about the matter; our dad was, like many First World War soldiers, an atheist, so we grew up in a muddle and finished with no religious connection at all.

There was a Kinema, a proper old bug rush cinema at the bottom of Lakedale Road, next to the Red Lion pub. If we went to the men's lavatory, at the corner of the pub, we could wait until it was quiet; then climb the wall and drop into the lavatory in the cinema; wait until we could follow a customer out; and then take a free seat.

Another 1930's Kinema memory I have is the organ recital during the interval, between films. The mighty Wurlitzer would rise in front of the stage at Granada's, played by a man in a white suit; they were, it seemed, all named Reginald: Reginald Porter, Reginald Brown, Reginald Dixon and Reginald Foort. One of the players used to turn up at Granada's in his white suit on a motorcycle combination, which we thought was a great laugh.

The largest sum of money I ever earned as a schoolboy was in my brief period of one year plus at senior school we were asked at woodwork classes what we would like to make. After asking the family and my brother-in-law, married to my sister in 1936, he asked me, could I make a bathroom cabinet come box seat. I approached the woodwork teacher, who said he would guide me and seemed very pleased at what was such a constructive idea. The box seat, with a hinged lid, contained a large number of stopped mortise and tenon joints of which I was inordinately proud. My brother-in-law of course paid for the materials and when I delivered it to their house he gave me five shillings (25p) for the work; the largest sum I had ever seen, a visit to the cinema then cost 4d, so this represented fifteen visits! And I loved the cinema. I have now grown accustomed to the idea, but when my sister was married in 1936 and the whole family went along to tea and to inspect the house (she had clearly married a wealthy man) I was somewhat surprised to find that there was a bathroom and in it a lavatory! That didn't seem at all the thing; lavatories were for outside; it seemed rather unhygienic to me.

I have however, in visiting my sister's bathroom in 1990, discovered that the bathroom stool is still in service, after 54 years. All a far cry from the early days of gas lamps in the streets when I originally made the cabinet. When the lamplighter made his evening rounds to light the lamps. Policemen were all on foot, carrying their capes with very conspicuous truncheons and uniform buttoned up to the throat. Postmen wore hard hats; groups of unemployed men marching the streets with bands; the poor being sent to the workhouse; husbands and wives were then separated, the wives to do indoor domestic work and the men sent out in their grey uniform suits to labour. When we used to have children's cinema matinee for 2d, if you could raise that amount. (When my sister died in 2001 I got the cabinet back).



*Sid aged 11 with Len and Molly at the beach, Jesson, Kent, on Sid's one and only weeks holiday.*



*Sid aged about 15 in back garden Parkdale Road, Plumstead.*



*Mr Dickins serving in his shop – Note the Easter egg display on the counter.*

*Both photos: Alan Read*

Our local shop was Dickins'. The Dickins' father was a very correct gentleman, always immaculately dressed; he used to shut the shop at 1 pm and at 1.01 pm walk down the road to the Brewery Tap pub where he would use the saloon bar (never mixing with the hoi polloi in the public bar). He would then return for lunch and reopen the shop at exactly 2 pm.

Another shop, further up the hill in Sladedale Rd, on the corner of Goldsmid Street, (which

was later owned by Mr and Mrs Dickins, his mum and dad), was also where the Co-op Insurance agent lived. Mr Welch owned the other shop, on the corner of Parkdale and Sladedale Roads. (Photo above) George Welch was the man I knew best. It seemed odd to me that a member of a settled-down Gypsy family became a Salvation Army member. He was learning the cornet; I asked him why he joined them. He said that the Salvation Army had the best looking girls! When the Welch family gave up their shop Mr Dickins' son Lennie took it over and ran it.



*Dickins corner grocer shop. Previously Welshe's greengrocer shop.*

Incidentally, I remember a family friend of ours who owned a car. In those days, in the mid 1930's, it was illegal to leave a vehicle parked on the road. So he had to garage it, in a group of garages on the corner of Sladedale Rd. My friend said when you added up the road fund and repairs it came to a pound a week! Considering that the weekly wage then was around three pounds a week it was a lot of money to pay.

When my parents were first living in Parkdale Rd. the rent was 3/9d per week. The house was insured for 125 pounds. The agent called at the house for the next 50 years, still collecting the 2/6d for the insurance. When the parents died the house was sold for 85,000 pounds, yet still insured for 125 pounds! Originally the owner wanted to dispose of the house and they bought it because then the mortgage was 3/3d per week. (Sixpence = 6d = two-and-a-half pence, which bought the weekend joint then!)

My mates in Sladedale Rd were the Dear family; in particular, Jack Dear, who was my age; and his sisters, who were slightly older, but I can't recall their names. They used to earn a few bob by going round the Working Men's clubs doing a tap dancing act.

Also, higher up in Sladedale Rd, was a family named Easter. The father was known as Captain Easter; whether he was ever a captain of a ship or in the army I can't recall. Every

Sunday evening in the summer Capt. Easter used to lead his family down Sladedale Rd, through Parkdale Rd, and along to the Brewery Tap pub. The other friend of mine in Sladedale Rd, who was motorbike crazy, was Doug Turner; he had a sister Iris.



*Sid aged 16 with his racing bike at back door Parkdale Road, Plumstead.*

All of us who lived in that area went to Conway Road School. I started at Conway School in 1930. It was certainly advanced for its time. We even started on Algebra among other subjects that were normally reserved for senior schools. The Head teacher in my time was a Mr Allen, known as Daddy Allen. He was a very proud man. He was a Fellow of the Linnean Society, a society concerned with certain species of plants. He used to get letters from a branch in Holland, addressed 'To Dr Allen', which he would read out proudly at school assembly. School assembly took place every morning and evening and we had to stand to attention and salute as the names of boys of the school were read out who had died in the war (WWI).

I remember one day when two kids were scrapping and arguing over some horse manure that they were collecting. One of the mothers spotted them and sternly called out loud to them, "'arf each!"

I remember the lovely great, green areas of Plumstead Common and Winn's Common. There were also the areas of woods around Shooters Hill, Oxleas Wood, Jack Wood and others and the great horse rides, maintained in my time by the Royal Artillery Saddle Club. We played at Cowboys and Indians in the woods. Also, if we wandered a little further on, there was a hollow over the fields where we used to drink water from the stream. That stream disappeared after WWII as the whole valley was used to dump the vast amount of war damage from the houses. The stream was piped underneath, but I wouldn't recommend

drinking the water nowadays! This valley led off of Swingate Lane, then off up another little old lane; this led out onto a valley, a lovely countrified rural scene. Up on the peak or brow of the valley was an old, run-down, derelict-looking pub called 'Fanny-On-The-Hill'. There were a few stories around as to how it got its name. One story says that the infamous highwayman robber Dick Turpin used it as place to hide out. In later years it was demolished.

We were five very clever little buggers at Conway Road: a geologist, an expert in naval gunnery optics, a university lecturer, a barrister and myself (a Chartered Certified Accountant & Chartered Tax Adviser). We were always vying with each other for first place; little horrors!

Some names I recall are: my mate next door to me in Parkdale Rd, Stan Bestwick; also a family by the name of Bryan who lived up the hill. There were the brothers Charlie and Ralph who had a large house in Parkdale Road; and they very generously allowed all of us boys to use one of their rooms as a playroom. We had a dartboard there and an old record player. They had records of old singers and they would accompany them on the banjo and the mandolin. Frank Crummit was the singer on the records. Each Christmas the very generous Charlie Thomas used to take us to see the Crazy Gang in the West End theatre.

We lived opposite the Public Relief Office, where parents had to go when they were really broke. When my father was out of work my parents applied for help. The inspector came to the house and said, "Sell your sewing machine and then come back!" My mum pointed out that she used the machine to mend all our clothes..."No help, then!" was the result. This is when my mother decided to take the front room window out and sold the bags of chips at a penny a bag to help support the family.

The poor old chaps from the workhouse, in Hull Place, Plumstead, used to be sent up to do the garden on the side of the Relief Office. The old couples were split up in the workhouse; terrible times. At one end of the Relief Office there was a flat that was let out to a sergeant of the Welsh Guards who rented it for most of my later youth. He had been sent home to die of TB and I can't remember him getting any help or treatment for it.

Both Peg my wife, and I, came from the poorest of families. We grew up to run a very successful professional practice, thus paying the highest rates of tax all our working lives. Yet, when I was a small boy we all had iron hoops, and skids with which to control them. We would chase madly all around town bowling our hoops. These hoops would split open sometimes and when this happened we took them to Joliffe's smithy where he would weld the hoop back together again for a penny.

So, many years later on, when I had my accountancy practice, James Joliffe and Charles Newton became clients of mine, and I often wondered what they would have thought if they knew that I was one of those little street Arabs who used to take my hoop in to them to be fixed. In those days, though, nothing would have been mentioned, as they were proper gentlemen.

Their smithy was in Tewson Rd, up an alley, at the back of Heads the greengrocers. They used to shoe the horses for the Beasley Brewery dray horses. I believe they also did the shoes for both the Co-op and the UD (United Dairy) dairies, plus those of the many other traders

that had horse-drawn wagons and vehicles in those times.

There was the large Co-op building with the hall that was on the corner of Lakedale and Conway roads. The hall was situated over the top of the Menswear Department. It was used for many different functions. My dad was a strong Co-op and union man. I was enrolled at this hall as a member of the Socialist Sunday School when I was six months old. I was also a member of the Woodcraft Folk Club at the Co-op hall.

The Co-op shop in Lakedale Road was a large department of shops that included groceries and provisions, men's tailoring, chemist, hairdressers and butchers. Sadly all long demolished; clock tower too!

I was also a very enthusiastic member of the Cage Lane Mission Hall and I was a Sunbeam on Tuesday evenings. The Minister there at Cage Lane was not an ordained man. He was a mad Scot who had one arm! He used to thump the pulpit with his metal arm. He was really quite nutty! The 11o'clock service would go on to 1.30 and he would say, "I can see ye wicked sinners thinking of your food but you are going to stay and hear me oot!"

He ordered us never to use the tram on Sunday, nor to eat hot food, as in each case it was keeping the tram driver from Chapel and the man at the Gasometer the same. I also attended all three services on Sundays. I used to pump the bellows of the manual organ. I got paid tuppence for this each time and sixpence on a Sunday, when I was aged 11. On one occasion I pumped the organ for a wedding and the groom gave me 2/6d...Wow!

I would run all the way into Woolwich with my money and put it into my savings card, at Bridges the tool shop in New Road. At Christmas time I would buy myself carpentry tools. For twenty-six shillings you could buy a lot of tools them days!

This shop owner, Bridger, became clients of my accountancy practice. This time I did tell the then Bill Bridger about my boyhood trips to his parents' shop.

The Cage Lane Mission used to organise a poor children's outing each year to Epping Forest. During our outing to Epping Forest we kids wore a card hanging from our coats that had written on it, 'The Woolwich Poor Children's outing'. The other local clubs, the Plumstead Radical Club and the Conservative Club also had outings, Sheerness by train and Margate by coach respectively.

As members of the Plumstead Radical Club we got to go on these trips to Sheerness, as our dad got tickets for us and also for our friend whose dad was a member of the Conservative Club. Our friend would then get us tickets for the Margate trip, as her dad belonged to the Conservative Club.

So we all did quite well, because family holidays were a rarity in those days.



Some local shops I recall. We used to go to Flora Terra's shop with our Saturday halfpenny. Her shop was up from Heads the greengrocers and practically opposite the Cage Lane Mission Hall. At this shop you could buy some fairly disgusting sweets, a whole 4 ozs worth, for a halfpenny! She also sold small tin cars, which were made in Japan, for one penny each.

I was born not far from this shop, at the bottom end of Parkdale Road. I recall the lovely smell of hops from the brewery that I had to pass four times a day, to and from school at Conway Road. I remember the trucks that used to bring the sacks of hops to the brewery. I also acquired this taste from when I went hop picking in the Hop season. At first, though, the smell from picking hops was quite enough to put one off drink for a life, but we got used to it. No wonder that I acquired a taste for real ale from an early age and have never ever lost it.

I remember when the manager would visit each pub and approve the supplies in an account book. The rents of the pubs were around 50 pounds per annum. Up from Heads was the house where the ground floor was let to two doctors, Andrew Mair and Grey Holmes. They were the same doctors who attended the poor at the Public Relief Office in Parkdale Rd, and also the workhouse in Hull Place.

When they retired their practice was taken over by a friend of mine, Charlie Clark. He used to go once a week to have law lessons from another friend of mine from Conway School, who was a successful Barrister. When the post came up, Charlie applied and got the job of Coroner for South West Essex.

Another group of local GPs had the premises at the junction of Parkdale and Brewery Roads, which was originally Philpott's Newsagents & Tobacconist, confectionery shop before he retired. He used to have advertisement boards outside his shop for the Kinema in Plumstead High St and for The Empire (formerly Barnards), the variety theatre in Beresford St. As a result he got free tickets for each performance and these were given to my sister and me, next up from my age. What a time we had with them! One of the doctors in the group was a pal of mine, George Menezes.

Opposite Philpott's paper shop lived a little old lady in a wee house. She used to sit at the front door knitting and weather permitting she was always there every single day for many years. She sat knitting scarves, jumpers, socks and all manner of knitwear to sell to support herself.

Robinson's shoe repair cobbler's shop was at the foot of Parkdale Road.

He started selling mucky sweets and a few fags. He had some machines outside the shop. One was for cigarettes called Crayol; two matches and three fags for tuppence! The kids used to steal like mad from his shop whilst another kid was asking about shoe repairs!

Some of the street vendor cries in the district in those days were: every Sunday morning, "Fresh cockles and winkles" from a man pushing his barrow; during the week, "Sweep!" a cry from a sooty man wheeling his barrow full of canes and brushes.

The Lakedale Road and area before WWII, was very much like a small village. It kept up with the times. I recall the firm of Bradshaw's Coaches, known as Bradshaw's Super Coaches and super they certainly were!

Albert Bradshaw went along with things OK but it was Annie Bradshaw, nee Annie Smith,

his wife, who was the real driving force. Annie was ahead of the times. She not only developed the coach business; she upgraded and bought the very latest models. She also developed it into a successful general booking agency, for theatre bookings and what have you. She also developed the greengrocery business. She had three brothers Smith who were all local fishmongers in the days when they had smoke holes on the shop premises. Their two shops were situated next to the fire station, Lakedale Rd and around the corner from it.

I won a place at Shooters Hill Grammar School when I passed my 11 plus, but I was told by my parents that I couldn't go there as they couldn't afford to send me there. I left Plumstead Central School at age 12 years (owing to a street accident) and on my 14th birthday commenced work as boy messenger and later a factory labourer.

Aged 15 I obtained a job as office boy in a local firm of accountants where I worked and studied at evening classes until I was conscripted into the Royal Artillery.

I continued studying by postal courses. I returned to the same job after the army. I eventually qualified in 1956 as associate of the Chartered Association of Certified Accountants and became a partner in the firm in 1959. In 1961 I became associate of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators and an Associate of the Chartered Institute of Taxation.

In May 1981 I became Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Arbitrators and advanced to Liveryman in 1987. I was admitted to the Freedom of the City of London in 1980.

*(Sid's story was compiled from the letters and cuttings and phone calls I made to him, after he had sent them to me via my appeal in the 'Shopper' newspaper.)*

***Footnote: Sid passed away in December 2007.***



# *Sladedale Road, Some Early Memories*

*Colin Weightman*

I was born in the upstairs front bedroom in the terraced house of 71 Sladedale Road, on the 8th of June, 1944, during WWII, two days after 'D' day.

At that time much of the world was still wearily at war. WWII raged on in Britain and over London. It and its population had suffered terrible death and destruction and around our neighbourhood were many bombsites.

My father's occupation was listed on my birth certificate as 'Gunner,' number 1619233 R.A. (Royal Artillery) and his civilian job was listed as, 'Insurance Agent'. I think that he had worked for the 'Pru" (Prudential Insurance).

At the time of my birth I believe that my dad was a fireman in the A.F.S. (Auxiliary Fire Service) He had previously been a soldier in the Royal Artillery, before it was discovered that dad was completely deaf in one ear.



*Colin's dad, Frank, (Back row, left) on duty as a fireman with the crew of the Auxiliary Fire Service along with their fire Tender at the junction of Winn's Common, Lakedale and King's Highway Roads during WWII.*

At the time of my birth the Germans began their new bombing campaign, sending over the skies of London their new terror weapons the flying bombs. First to cause havoc was the V1, soon to be known as the 'Doodle Bug' and the 'Buzz Bomb' because of the distinctive droning sound that its engine made.



Shortly after this terror weapon had begun to rain its death and destruction indiscriminately on innocent folk, it was soon joined by the V2 rocket.

As these horror weapons wrought mass destruction the children were once again evacuated out of London and into the comparative safety of the distant countryside.



*Evacuating London's children during the first part of WWII.*



*Colin at six months, evacuated to Burton Bradstock, Photo taken in a Bridport studio at Christmas 1944.*



*Colin, still an evacuee, at about one year old.*

I was evacuated, along with my two elder brothers and my mother, to a little village called Burton Bradstock, in Dorset, in the West Country. I was too young to remember any of this, as I was only a very young baby.

After the war, on the 5th of May in 1947, I vividly remember the night that my baby sister Ann came into the world. I remember sitting on a chair in front of the coal fire in our living room watching the flickering flames through the spark guard. I was wondering why I was on my own and still up at this late hour. I also wondered what the fuss was up stairs. With curiosity I got down and climbed up the stairs. I was two years eleven months old at the time. Reaching the top of the stairs I opened the front bedroom door and peered inside and was very surprised indeed to see a naked baby being held upside down by a white coated person

who then proceeded to smack the babies bottom, which, not surprisingly to me, made it cry very loudly. And then, as if this wasn't bad enough for me to witness, this same baby, still crying loudly, was handed over to another white coated person who then cut the babies willie off with a pair of scissors! As you can imagine, I was very much alarmed indeed to see all this. (Understandably so as I didn't know about such things as birth and umbilical cords). It was then when I was spotted by the person who had done the smacking, who said sternly, "What's he doing here?" and I was led back down stairs, still somewhat dazed, by my good elderly next door neighbour Sally who put me back on the chair by the fire again, whilst quietly talking some reassuring kind words to me.

I remember lots of things in my early young life. One of these is when, as a very young toddler, I would accompany my mother on her shopping trips. We would often walk long distances to the shopping areas into Woolwich, often via Plumstead Common Road and the Woolwich Common area. I recall that when we passed a bombsite I could smell the soot and concrete rubble, a particularly pungent kind of smell. This smell I associated with death and destruction because of the many accounts I had over heard from adults as they recounted the terrible war years. Being only a youngster, it felt menacingly ominous to pass by these sinister bombsites. Ever since those early days whenever I smell soot those early distant memories come back to me.

Gradually, as I grew, I was allowed to venture outside into the street to play on my own and,

as I got older, I was allowed to roam further afield and it wasn't long before I would go off for the whole day, wandering far and wide, often many miles from home. My mates then were my neighbours, kids from the other families living mainly at our end of the street, and they would accompany me on my travels.



*Sally (Ridge) our lovely elderly next-door neighbour. C1955.*

We played happily for hours in and around the street and down in the 'oller building huts and things. In good weather we'd go up to the Common, either to the paddling pool or the ponds at the ravine, to throw stones into, to float our home made boats or to catch stickle-backs or newts in our jam jars with string tied round them for handles. We'd often go exploring up the inflow pipe, a place of twilight darkness that echoed our excited children's voices.

There were many local bombsites, these were good areas to play on, to play-act war games and build huts on, as indeed were all the bombsites as they also had a good source of old rubble to build with. The pungent smell of soot had diminished

somewhat over the first few years after the war. We got a lot of pleasure from playing on these bombsites because we were so unrestricted with the things we kids could do and get up to. So smashing bottles and glass, throwing bricks, bashing and breaking things was all allowed, the noise and mess we made was no problem, it was already in a mess so it didn't matter, the bombsites became that generation of kid's adventure playgrounds where you could play for hours, letting off steam, and we sure did plenty of that.



It seems that we got up to a bit of mischief, as kids tend to do. Bert Hooper recalls, fifty years later on, of how I had shown him, as a kid of about eight, how to get into the back of the then old disused Globe cinema in Birds Nest Gully. We went inside and the floor was strewn with old black and white glossy film photos, nowadays they'd be worth a lot to collectors.

*Colin aged six and sister Ann aged three at the seaside.*

Sundays we became little angels when we went to Sunday School, togged up in our good clothes, at the tin chapel opposite Winn's Common. Some of the

younger Beacham children, my young sister Ann and other local kids went along. We would get a coloured sticker depicting some religious scene from a Bible story that we had been read to by Mr and Mrs Goldsack, two lovely elderly folk who were very patient with us very fidgety kids. We would stick these coloured stamps into little books each week until we had a collection of these little booklets. I recall that once a year they gave each child a lovely smelling smooth rounded pure white bar of soap that had a swan embossed on it. (A luxury gift when you consider us kids only washed with large rough lumps of strong smelling carbolic or Lifebouy soap).



*Mum and her lovely neighbour Mrs Beacham,  
at the beach on a Sunday School outing. c1950.*

The Sunday School had an annual outing for us kids and our families when we excitedly travelled by coach to the seaside for the day.

To travel on a coach was a real treat for us kids. We hardly ever got to go on any long journeys. I

remember the excitement and the preparation of the packing of our clothes and the making and all our sandwiches and drink the evening before and of how difficult it was for me to get to sleep the night before the trip because of my excitement.

I was in the Scouts for a short while. I went along to the Plumstead Library building as the Scouts meetings were held in the hall there. Our pack was entered into a competition at a big Scouting event. The event we was in involved dashing madly round a track pulling a large wooden hand cart which had to be stripped down into separate parts, carried over an obstacle and reassembled and then another mad dash to the finish line. The fastest team winning. We practiced hard at every Scout meet for quite a few weeks, which consisted of lots of rushing around the perimeter of the large hall at breakneck speeds. That heavy barrow had large wooden cartwheels with steel rims and it would skid sideways on the . polished wooden floor as we sped round the corners. My part was to grab the left wheel and



carry it over and position it back onto the axle. We practised regularly and were very rigorously spurred on by our enthusiastic Scout leader into better and faster times. We could strip out the split pins, whip across the obstacle, holding onto the heavy wheels and others the shaft and the others the cart body and reassemble it all again before tearing off to the finish line at ever increasingly faster times.

*Mum, back garden with sister Ann aged about two.*

The day of the event eventually arrived and our team looked quite a puny bunch when compared to the other strapping sized Scouts in the opposing teams. Our turn arrived and we positioned ourselves on the start finish line and away we flew. Skidding round the grass track as one, stripping the

barrow down and over the obstacle. I badly bashed my shin and fingers on the wheel as we sprinted over the obstacle. Once reassembled again we tore along to the finish line. It just goes to show though that practice makes perfect 'cos we cleaned everyone up as the fastest team, winning by a really fast margin over everyone else.

At home in our back garden we had a very small pond that had a rockery on one side. In this pond we had stickle backs, minnows, newts, shubunkin goldfish and frogs and toads. Every year the frogs and toads would come out of the rockery from their hibernation and the water would soon be a mass of stringy toad spawn and clusters of frogspawn. When these hatched out they'd fill up the pond with black plump tadpoles, which we fed with tiny pieces of lettuce and meat. My dad would cull them out by a 'netting and stamping' method. He said that it was "natural selection" and was very necessary in order to keep a natural balance.

We also had a small fenced pen that we kept two tortoises in. We added a third tortoise years later. Every winter they would hibernate in a small wooden box house that was their home during the spring and summer months in which they slept at night. Once they had decided it was time to hibernate they just stayed inside the house. In preparation for this event each year we'd fill their box home with straw, and once they hibernated we'd fill it over with dirt, covering the box completely. Every springtime they would dig their way out and enjoy another season. They lived for many long years in our back garden and when we eventually moved we gave them to Bert Hooper our neighbour. Unfortunately they were killed by a neighbour's dog a few years later.

Our back garden was well used by us kids. I was allowed to tend a small garden on one side of it and we played happily riding our trikes up and down the central narrow concrete path.



*Ann aged about two on the trike c1949.*



*Ann holding a tortoise with cousin Alan.*



*Ken, my deaf next door neighbour.*



*Me aged about four in our back garden c1948.*



*David (professor) Morrison, aged ten, & Charlie Reed, aged eight, Sladedale Rd. c.1956`.  
Photo: Colin Weightman.*



*Henry Charles Reed, Charlie's dad ("Buster") and his partner Jack Gardiner- they were motor dealers. Photo: Maureen Dunmall.*



*John, Maureen and Charlie Reed, at back garden door, 72 Sladedale Road. c1955.  
Photo: Maureen Dunmall.*



*Albert (Bert) Hooper, 1953. Timbercroft School.  
Photo: Albert.Hooper.*



*Brother John with Ken, Ann and me in the old builders cart outside 69 Sladedale Road c1948.*



*David, pillion, and Colin on brother Mark's James motorbike c1955.*



*My eldest brother Mark on his restored Rudge Rapid motorbike.*



*Colin and his brothers and sister with nan sitting on the front steps of 71 Sladedale Road, Plumstead, 1949.*

*Colin's younger sister Ann, sitting on nan's lap, aged two, brothers Mark 11 and John 9.*

*(Colin, aged five, bottom left, and sister Ann were both born upstairs in the front bedroom)*

*The other girl (cropped) is cousin Sheila (Evans).*

*Photo: Colin Weightman.*



*The view from 69 Sladedale Road and over Roydene Road across to the terraced houses of Tormount Road and the long demolished St Mark's Church, c1958.  
Photo: Colin Weightman. (Taken on a Brownie box camera)*



*Sister Ann in front of uncle Jack's (Evans) car, c1955.*

# *Smells And Noises!*

*Sheila Lee (nee Jordan)*

## **Plumstead c.1940-45**

Beasley's Brewery, Lakedale Road. I've seen it called other things but to us it was Beasley's. I still cannot abide the smell of yeast. Brewery smells floated over Plumstead incessantly. We were told it was good for our complexions! The drayman lived close by and he brought the dray to Kentmere Road while he had his 'dinner'. The magnificent, brass bedecked dray horses munched from their nosebags, untethered, ignoring everyone and everything going on around them.

The Dust Destructor in Whitehart Lane, always belching out malevolent fumes but everything has its upside, and the DD was a wonderful source of 'stuff' or 'ill-considered trifles' to make bikes, prams (a box on wheels), go-carts. Indeed, a boys' heaven!



*A pair of Clydesdale horses pulling a Beasley's brewery dray passing Head's the greengrocers in Lakedale Road*

The Piggery, where all 'edible' waste was taken – there was normally a pig bin in the road but, as I recall, very little waste – food was not abundant. Of course pigs, hundreds of pigs, do smell, as did the waste food when it was being processed. Again, it had an upside and many of us visited the piggery. When we banged on the corrugated fence the pigs came running to us to have their backs scratched. Somebody would be eating them tomorrow. I do not however recall having a nice piece of roast pork or a pork chop!

And noises' – plenty of them. Burning off cordite in the Arsenal created huge explosions (controlled!). I remember a 'cordite worker' coming home each day for his dinner and his

skin was bright yellow from the sulphur smoke and fumes. So much for Health and Safety!

The railway wagons shunting in the goods yard adjacent to the Arsenal on the marshes. The crashing and banging of wagons was incessant, done particularly at night for safer movement. Probably unknown to our mothers, the wagon yard was yet another of our playgrounds, crawling in and out of the wagons playing 'hide'n seek' or just for devilment!

Best of all, the street cries. 'Rag an Bone', 'Shrimps and Winkles', and, during the war years, "Lights Out" or "Put that \*\*\*\* light out!" and "You all right in there missus?" "All Clear!" and the most joyful of all, "He's coming home!"

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# *Snowballing Reminiscences*

*Councillor Don Austen,*

**January 2002**

I was recently struck by a Christmas card produced by the Plumstead Common Environment Group. It had a black and white photograph, (as shown, in picture) taken in 1909, of knickerbockered schoolboys snowballing outside St Margaret's Church on Plumstead Common. The more I gazed at it the more the scene came to life. Twenty boys aged nine to twelve laughing and gleefully pounding each other, their grey icy breath on the air. I could feel the chill, dark cheeks obviously red raw in the tangible cold air, ankle deep in snow. I wanted to climb into the photograph and join in. That's right, I've never really grown up! And as I looked I wondered was it winter early 1909 or before Christmas that year? Those boys of 93 years ago all gone now, I presume.



I wondered what lives they lived, with World War I looming. Did they exchange snowballs for hand grenades, rifles and bayonets? Who and where are their descendants? And how different life was in 1909. It's easy to conjure a romantic picture of the Edwardian era, of horse-drawn vehicles and just the occasional new-fangled contraption, the motorcar, and home cooking in the 'gaslight' era. However the reality was much different, abject poverty, no medical treatment for all, horrible diseases rampant, primitive sanitary conditions, long arduous hours of work six days a week with no sick or holiday pay and health and safety procedures a distant dream. No luxuries of TV or radio, no central heating (let alone double glazing!). And Sundays a long, dull day of supposed rest, which gave rise to the saying 'a month of Sundays', describing a lengthy, boring period. And definitely no Welfare State. Thankfully, we've come a long way since 1909.

In the escapism of sport, Newcastle United won the Football League Championship and Manchester United won that year's FA Cup, sandwiched between League championships, nothings changed! England's soccer and cricket teams were masters of the world. Now that's changed! Kent won the County Championship for the second time and Jack Johnson was the World Heavyweight Boxing Champion. The first black man to win the title, which he held for seven years, he is still arguably considered by connoisseurs to be the best ever. Indeed, the giant allied field guns of the 'Great War' were referred to as 'Jack Johnson's'.

It's a time long since gone with some surviving silent film; gone, to be read about and talked about in family histories. Yes, I wondered what happened to those happy boys and as I looked at the card I raised a glass and silently wished 'em "God bless."

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



## *Some More Characters*

### **Hubert Manwaring-Spencer (Spike)**

My grandfather's brother's wife, Lillie Manwaring, worked in the Woolwich Arsenal during the First World War.



*The armband pictured, was the one she wore. I think she was a supervisor or charge woman!*

*Colour, red crown on green armband.*



*The badge shows a munitions worker.*

Lillie was very public spirited and was a member of the Salvation Army.

Her husband was a police constable, stationed at Plumstead Police Station, PC Harry Manwaring. They lived in Manor Road, Erith.

Before that he was in the 3rd Volunteer Battalion, Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, based at Woolwich.

In the early photo of the women munitions workers, three of the women are wearing the armbands. I think the photo was taken between 1900 and 1915.



The Woolwich Arsenal photo is an early post card that shows the crowds of Arsenal workers at the Middle Gate. Everyone seems to be wearing a hat or a cap, as was the fashion in those times. The post card has a postmark on the back dated 29th April 1912.



*Private A.D.Manwaring (flanked by two Indian soldiers).  
He was my grandfather, seen here during The Great War (which he survived).*



*PC Harry Manwaring was stationed at Plumstead Police Station.  
He was my grandfather's brother.*



*Lillie Manwaring on motorbike in Salvation Army Uniform,  
wife of PC Harry Manwaring. She was the supervisor in the  
Woolwich Arsenal and the armband and badge were hers.*

# *Some Schools Remembered*

*Compiled by Colin Weightman*

Schools played an integral part in our childhood memories so here are some schools remembered.



*Ancona Road School, about 1946.*

*I am not sure of the date as we were only at Ancona for a few months before moving to Bloomfield Rd.*

*Photo: Ken Costin.*

*Seated on the ground, third boy from the right, without a tie is Ken Costin.*

*See Ken's story: Ken Costin's Blast From The Past.*

*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 ran a newsagent shop.*

*Also on the same row but from the left,*

*3rd boy in, was called Peter Walters.*



*Ancona Road Secondary School, 1946.*

*Photo: Derek Boswell.*

*Back row from left (1) Teacher Jack Harris. (2) Raymond Howard (3) Muerig Tasker (4) Alfie Thompson (lived in Villas Road) (6) John Disbur R/H end H.E.V.Gillham (Headmaster)*

*Front row from left. (1) Kenneth Higgins (2) Frank Ward (lived in Piedmont Road) (3) Terry Pickett (lived in Roydene Road) (6) Paul Moore (7) Melvyn Daws (lived in Glyndon Road) (8) Kenneth Boswell (lived in Ingledeu Road) (10) Francis Howard.*

*After Ancona Road School closed, probably in 1948, most pupils went to Plum Lane or to Bloomfield Road.*

*I don't have names for photo but it is possible to recognise several of those present in the Ancona Road picture.*



*Bannockburn Nursery School, about 1959. Photo: Lynda French.  
Lynda Stevens (now French) is in the back row, 2nd in on the left.*



*Bloomfield School, c.1955 Photo: Anne Clarke. Brian Rake is in the front row, third in from the right! See Brian's story: Brian Rake (Rakey) Remembers.*



*Burrage Road Primary School c1953? Photo: Diane Hagan (nee Plater).*



*Burrage Road School. 1952. Photo: Ken Costin.*

*Joyce Costin is seated bottom row, 4<sup>th</sup> from left.*



*Plumstead Central School Grade II 1910. Photo: Diane Hagan nee Plater.*



*Conway (Plumstead Central) Primary School 1880's.*

*Photo: Spike (Hubert Manwaring-Spencer).  
 My grandfather Arthur Manwaring is in the front row of desks,  
 on your left as you look at it  
 (We are not entirely sure if it is Conway School)*



*Plumstead Central School c.1930. Photo: Iris Gildon.  
Iris Hannaford (now Gildon) is first girl seated on left in back row.  
See Iris's story: Life In The 1920's, 30's And 40's.*



*Conway Infants Class, 1950.*

*Second row from Back (L to R) 4th John Saunders, 8th Alan West.  
Front row (L to R): 2nd, Colin Weightman, 6th, Peter Beezer.*

*Photo: Alan West.*



*Conway Infants School Induction class, 1950. Photo: Alan Gibbs.*

*Top row, left to right. 2nd boy; Dave Clancy 4th boy, Alan Gibbs.*

*5th Boy, Michael Shaw, 6th boy, Albert Burrell. (His parents ran the Brewery Tap Pub)*

*Albert's son Ian writes: Michael Shaw and Albert started on the same day aged 5 and are still close friends (how many can claim that!). Apparently this is a rare photo of them standing together as they were regularly separated in class. Granddad was the manager of the pub but mum & dad ran the pub the way they wanted to and lived in it. Apparently it was a great playground for young boys!*

*7th boy, Derick Ives, 9th boy, Frank Perfitt.*

*2nd row, from top, left to right.*

*2nd boy, Brian Laurence (I think)*

*3rd row, from top, left to right.*

*1st girl, Margaret Ball, 3rd boy, Barry Stove, 4th boy, Brian Moore,*

*5th boy, Terry Holton.*

*Note the lean to the right of all the children.*

*This was because the photo was taken on the sloping playground  
at the side of the school.*



Conway School, 1953. See below for names of the students.  
 Photo and names: Joan Doling.

Back row from left to right

Breen Radman, Diane Broadshaw, Linda Davis, Ruth Hobbs, Pat Chapman,  
 Gisle Nye, Dorothy Hove, Jacquie Cooper, Pamela Herbert, Sylvia  
 Buttsworth, Ann Hoader.

Middle row from left to right

Susan Hamlin, John Paice, David Glenan, Terry Blackmore, Keil Willis,  
 Tony Alcorn, George Colgate, Terry Ginnale, ? Frances, Gisle Bradley,

Bottom Middle row from left to right

Linda Vinton, Victor Harris, Ann Stennard, Peter Dean, Gisle Maynard,  
 Paul Finch, Jacely Bowley, Donald Anziworth, Gwen Salter, Norman Bryan  
 and Jill Elson.

Bottom row from left to right

Joan Doling (me), Pamela Taylor, Pat Jannaway, Pamela McClellan  
 and Hilda Smith.



*Conway Road Junior School, c1954. Photo: Jacqueline Wilmot.*

*Top Row: ?, Graham Hooper  
Middle row: ?, ?, Jacqueline Alcorn (now Willmott)*

*See story: Memories of a Young Plumstead Girl.*



*Conway Primary School 1958. Photo: Ivor Dunmall.*



*Teaching Staff at Conway Road School c.1954-5. Photo: John Ball.*



*Conway Road School, 1960. Photo: Derek Crompton.*

*Derick Cropton says:*

*Looking at my school report for 1960 class 1c. I came 31 out of a class of 38. Gone down hill since then. Our Head teacher was a Mrs F Skelton. The form mistress was M.K.A. Carter. She wrote, "Derek has made good progress". I think that was more out of pity more than fact. We look a happy load of kids. The wind must have been blowing from the direction of the Beasley Brewery just up and across the road from the school. Or did they bribe us with a half day of? I'm sitting with my legs crossed, front row on the right end.*



*Earl Rise Primary School c1949. Photo: Sandra Hilton (nee Lee).  
Sandra is in the second row from the front, second from left.*



*Earl Rise School c1955. Hazel Scarrott, front row, second from left. We used to live at 17 Oliver Street - all gone now in the 60's. Photo: John Scarrott.*



*Earl Rise Primary School, late 1950s. Photo: Wynne Handley (nee English).*

*Wynne Handley (nee English) says:*

*I attended Earl Rise School in the late 1950s. On the above photo I'm second row, 4th from right, my cousin is sitting in the front row, 2nd from left. I think the photo is about 1955/6. My name at the time was Winnie English. What I do remember very clearly is a young teacher called Mr Earl. I think he must have had a social conscience as he used to take groups of children for outings in his own car. My group went to London zoo it was the first time I had ever been and now nearly fifty years later I still remember it. It was still quite rare to own a car in those days and so a car drive was also a great treat.*

*We lived in Armstrong Place, Woolwich, which was knocked down in 1959/60. We moved to the brand new housing estate in Abbey Wood. My cousin and his family lived in Maxey Road until that too was knocked down and they moved to Suffolk. My father and I used to walk through Rockcliffe gardens to visit my mother's grave in Woolwich Cemetery when she died in 1961. Shortly after that we too moved out of the area.*

*See Wynne's story: Woolwich childhood.*



*Earl Rise Primary School c1952-53 Infant class. Photo: Barbara Bourne.*

*Teacher, left, Miss Humphries. Headmistress, Miss Cooke, right.*

*Back row, next to Miss Humphries, Rita Loney, 4th from left, David Fryer. Back row 6th from left, Richard Foy.*

*Middle row, 3rd from left, John Pool, 5th, me (Barbara Bourne) 6th, Michael Leader, 7th, Douglas Borne.*

*Front row, on end at left, Michael Turley.*



*Foxhill School, Woolwich 1950 with Don Wilkingson 2nd row front, 2nd from left.*



*Gallions Mount School, 1947. Photo: Alan Putt.*

*This is a picture of, I think, Form 3b in 1947. I cannot remember too many names but on the far left front is David Edwards. Behind him is Dorothy Robinson; fifth from the left in the back row is Stewart Manley. I am third from the left in the front row and Roy Catton is immediately behind me.*



*Gallions Mount, school play, 1955 (I think). Sorry I can't identify anybody other than me Terry Byatt.*

*Photo: Terry Byatt.*



*Gallions Mount School October 1952. David Morrison is second row down, 5<sup>th</sup> from left.*



*Garrison Infants School, 1926 in New Road, Woolwich. Photo: Lorna Chudasama.*

*My mother, Leonora Riches, nee Wilson, attended the original Garrison Infants School but this school closed soon after the photograph was taken and my mother and her sister Winnie then went to Mulgrave Primary School*

*My mother has an ink mark on her cardigan. Her sister Winnie is the fourth girl in the row behind her. Winnie is wearing a ribbon in her hair and there is a slight ink mark above her head.*



*King's Warren School. Next to the Old Mill which is situated behind the pub.  
Called the 'Brown School' (now Plumstead Manor) in Old Mill Road.  
Photo: Derek Crompton.*

*In Plumstead the grammar school for girls was Kings Warren, or The Brown School, because their uniform was brown. Seen here in this 1940 photo.*

*The man with the white coat and handcart was the milkman, standing in Warwick Terrace where the 53 bus route started. But, what was the name of (?) Place, (bombed in WW2, I remember pre-fabs being there) the corner the pub is on?*

*See stories:*

*Memories of Childhood by Alan West.*

*Life in the 1920s 30s and 40s by Iris Gildon (nee Hannaford).*

*Memories of Plumstead Common and King's Warren School by Sheila Andrews.*



*Oakmere School. Mr Warner is the teacher. John Reed, 1st left, seated row, Robert Morris, 2nd row standing, 3rd from right. Photo: Robert Morris.*



*Plum Lane School 1954.*

*The Teacher is Mr Benjamin (Ben to us) Kearns: David Butler 2nd row from bottom, fourth from the right. Photo: David Butler.*



*Plumcroft School play 1954.*

*Photo: Roger Edwards.*

**First Row {A}** (1) Carol Blake (2) Kay Gravestock (3) Peter Whittaker (4) Anthony Meech (5) Richard Black (6) Roger Edwards (7) Michael Porch (8) Robin Easton (9) David Jeffery.

**Second Row {B}** (1) Helen ? (2) Jean McGarrity (3) Margaret Mannell (4) Charlie Botfield (5) Susan Hogben (6) Susan Vosper (7) Hilary Simmons (8) Jackie Fuller (9) Peter Bathe.

**Third Row {C}** (1) Peter Constable (2) Vera Burton (3) Angie Snelson (4) Rosalind Page (5) Janice White (6) Celia Edwards (7) Ian Button? (8) Hilary Gimson (9) Anette Catchpole (10) Valerie Hill (12) Frank Hathaway.

**Fourth Row {D}** (1) David Jeffery (2) Peter Sullivan (3) Raymond Martin (4) John Waller (5) Alan Randall (6) Christopher Cook (7) Richard Barton (8) John Turner (9) Richard Turner.



*Plumcroft Primary School, 1957.*

*Photo: Roger Edwards.*

**Front row.** (1) Jacqueline Fuller (2) Valerie Riden (3) Angela Snelson (4) Elizabeth Hind (5) Susan Vosper (6) Annette Catchpole.

**2nd row.** (1) Susan Hogben (2) Hillary Simmons (3) Valerie Wake (4) Ian Button (5) David Jeffery (6) Peter Whittaker (7) John Blowers (8) John Turner (9) Christopher Cook.

**3rd row.** (1) Janice White (2) Rosalind Page (3) Jean McGarrity (4) Valerie Hill (5) Richard Black (6) David Jeffery (7) Robin Easton (8) Richard Turner (9) Peter Constable (10) Michael Porch (11) Richard Barton (12) Peter Bathe.

**4th row.** (1) Margaret Mannell (2) Kay Gravestock (3) Hilary Gimson (4) Vera Burton (5) Helen ? (6) Roger Edwards (7) Alan Randal (8) John Waller (9) Charlie Botfield (10) Frank Hathaway (11) Raymond Martin (12) Anthony Meech.



*Timbercroft School, taken in July 1946. Photo: Ken Costin.*

*Ken Costin is seated on the ground, fifth from the left.*

*See story: Ken Costin's Blast from the Past.*

*Allison Morgan writes:*

*"My Mum is seated on the floor, 3rd from the right (her maiden name was Jean Butcher). Next to her friend is Susan Hedges, as mentioned in Ken's story: Ken Costin's Blast From The Past".*



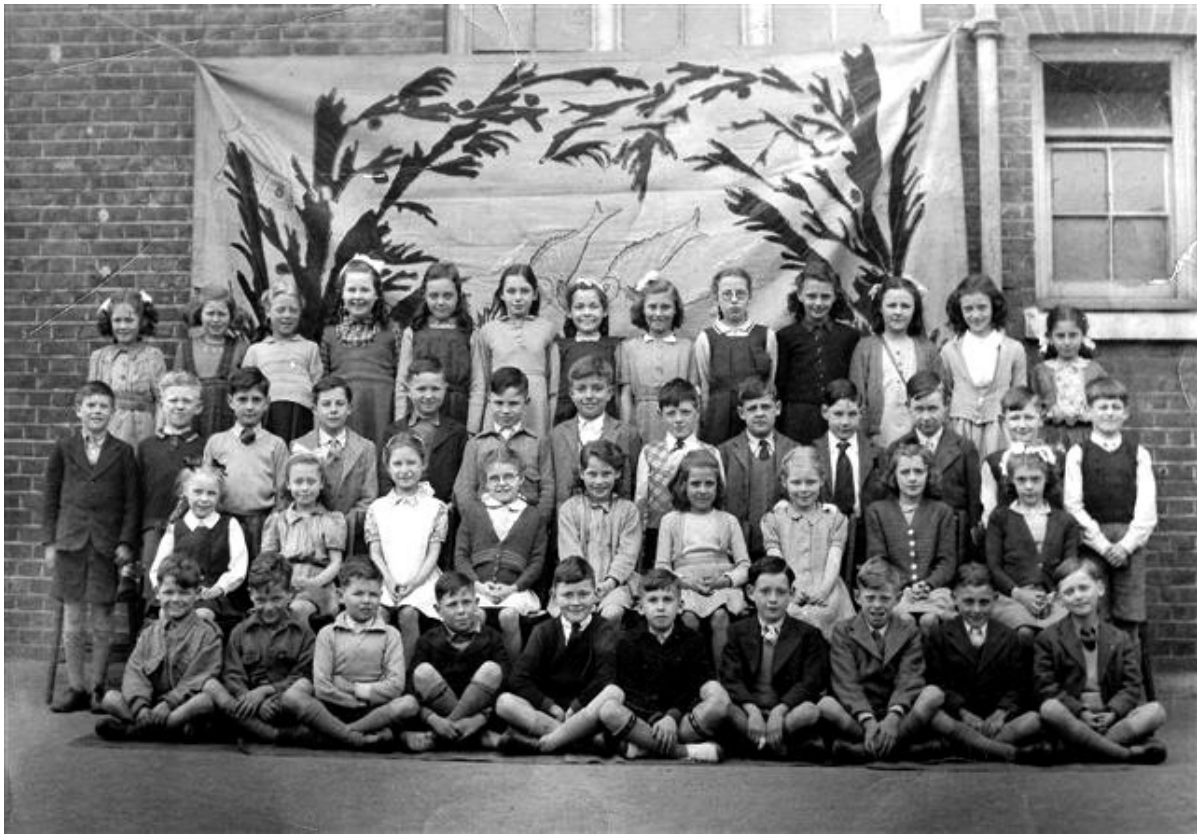
*Timbercroft School 1947-48. Joyce Costin is seated bottom row, 2nd from the left. Photo: Ken Costin*

*Chris Kitchenham says: 'I believe the girl in the middle row, 7th from the right, is Valerie Carey, the close friend mentioned in my story, "A Young Boy Remembers The War Years in Plumstead".*



*Timbercroft School, possibly around 1905-6. Kit, second girl standing from left, next to the little girl with the two bows, is Louise Vernon's great, great aunt Catherine Emma (Kit) who was born 16<sup>th</sup> March 1900 to parents Sydney Wallace Dillon and Catherine Emma Heasman (Dolly) my great, great grandparents. Photo: Louise Vernon.*

*See also in: 'Some Street Scenes': Wernbrook Street (No 27) photo and its accompanying text.*



*Timbercroft Primary School.*

*Photo: John Allen.*

*John says,*

*'My recollections of my early days are rather vague but I hope the attached school photograph of my class taken in 1946 or 1947 may be of some use to you, (I am in the front row 4th from the left).*

*The only other names I can remember are the Baulchin twins (front row, 1st and 2nd on the left) and Joey Bee (2nd from left, 3rd row back).'*'



*Timbercroft School, 1954. Photo: Susan Bennett via Peter Barrett.*

*Back row: Mr Seebrook, Susan Bennett.*

*Front row: Middle with Dark Jumper is Peter Barrett.*

*Others known, but positions in photo not defined, they are:*

*Shirley Calhouqn, Susan Griffiths, Barbara McDonald, Francis Blatcher, Diane ?, Vioiene Coomber, Sally Priest, Joyce ? Linda Stoker, Hilda Mitchell, Deryn Gino. Graham Brown, Norman ?, Roger Thompson, Leslie Ellis, Brian Sams, Terry Lauder, Terry Orton, Kieth Williams, Richard Whiting, Brenda Martin, Elaine Taylor, Maureen Tye, Penelope Ratcliff, Barbara David, Daphne Spray, Maureen Hill, Mary Diamond, Susan Webber, Geoffrey ?, Paul Covely, Geoffrey Reese, Andrew Gaskin, Peter Barrett, John Masters, Colin Castledine, Stanley Black, Alan Pond, Linda Wells, Albert Hooper.*



*Timbercroft School. Photo 1954, (different stream from the previous photo).*

*Photo: June Cook via Peter Barrett.*

*Some of the known names are:*

*Albert (Nick-name: Doona) Simpson, Ruth Richards, Doris McKerril (I),*

*Bob Lynch, Teddy Waghorn, John Hill, June Cook,*

*Craig Murry, Teresa (Green). Mary Palmer,*

*Barbara Fry, Dessi Morgan, Michael Alford.*



*Timbercroft School 1960-61. Photo: John Thompson.*



*Wickham Lane School 1950. Photo: John Miles.*

*Looking at the photo: that's me, John Miles, the smart one standing next to Mr Griffin far left, I can remember most of them by name and some a bit of a guess so starting from the back left; Collins. Manning. Lancano. Don't know. Beadle. Childs. Knot. Don't Know.*

*Next row: Mr Griffin, John Miles, Cook, Basil, Gething, Don't Know, Don't Know, Fryer, Bance, and Headmaster Mr Wale.*

*Next row down: left. Don't know, Don't know, Dunmall, Loft, Pine, Don't know, Pucey?*

*Front row: left Simons, Don't know, Don't know, Crafton, Don't know, Don't know, Bridges, Boilet, And Stewart.*



*Wickham Lane Primary School 1945. John Redman, aged five, making a tent, smartly dressed in white shirt and braces and shorts and tidy combed hair, probably slicked with the popular Brylcream hair cream. John lived across the Wickham Lane, up at number 46 King's Highway. He lived there until 1962.*

*See story: King's Highway In The 1940's And 50's.*



*Woolwich Poly Cricket IX Team 1919.*

# Some Teachers

Dave Carpenter

I went to Timbercroft School, then on to Bloomfield School. We had some strange teachers in those days.

The Headmaster of Timbercroft, Mr Huggins committed suicide some time after I left, and the chemistry teacher at Bloomfield, I won't mention his name, battered his wife and children to death with a hammer. They put him in Broadmoor; he eventually came out, as a friend of mine saw him in Woolwich many years later.

The Headmaster was Thomas Smith ('Thos') as he was known. He ruled with a rod of iron, or should I say cane. It was common to be sent to his study, where you received six of the best! More serious misdemeanours were dealt with on the stage in front of the assembly. These punishments hardened you up, but did nothing for the morale of the pupils.

I always thought I would go back and sort out one or two of the bullying teachers, but during my apprenticeship in the docks where I worked with real men, I realized what a pathetic lot the bullies were; I even felt quite sorry for them.



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# *Stephen John Head, Killed By A WWI Zeppelin*

*Mark Head*

Family legend has it that Stephen John Head died about 1918 as a result of injuries from a WWI German Zeppelin raid over Plumstead. He was a Civil Defence Warden and got everyone into a shelter except himself. He survived the air raid, but died sometime later from his injuries.



*Stephen John Head and Susannah Head, nee Avery, in  
Plumstead about 1910.*

# *Stubborn Horses*

*Bob Kentsley*

I had worked for the RACS, which was based in Woolwich. They also had depots in Plumstead and other districts. I worked from the Catford Depot on the bread rounds, which took us as far away as Greenwich where we used to meet up with our friends from Woolwich. This was when pig bins were well and truly set up in great numbers in all the roads throughout the London Boroughs and, I understand, were maintained by the Police Force.

My driver (a lady) and I had a horse named Nemo. Nemo got to know that certain goodies were often dumped in these smelly bins. Nemo also realised how much more tasty these goodies were to munch on compared with his humble nosebag.

With a full vanload of bread we used to walk beside Nemo when going up a hill, to ease his load for the hard day ahead. The bread van had pneumatic tyres and a very good handbrake. However, when Nemo spotted a pig bin he would make for it, ignoring anything that might be in his way.

If my driver or me spotted one, we would automatically put the handbrake on to keep Nemo from moving. But, with enormous strength, he used to be able to struggle up to the bin, remove the heavy lid with his nose and munch away!

Once he got to the bin we used to let him eat, that was until he was spotted by a member of the constabulary who, on these occasions, would often threaten us with all sorts of punishment if we did not remove Nemo from his banquet. This we would do, but it took a great deal of effort.



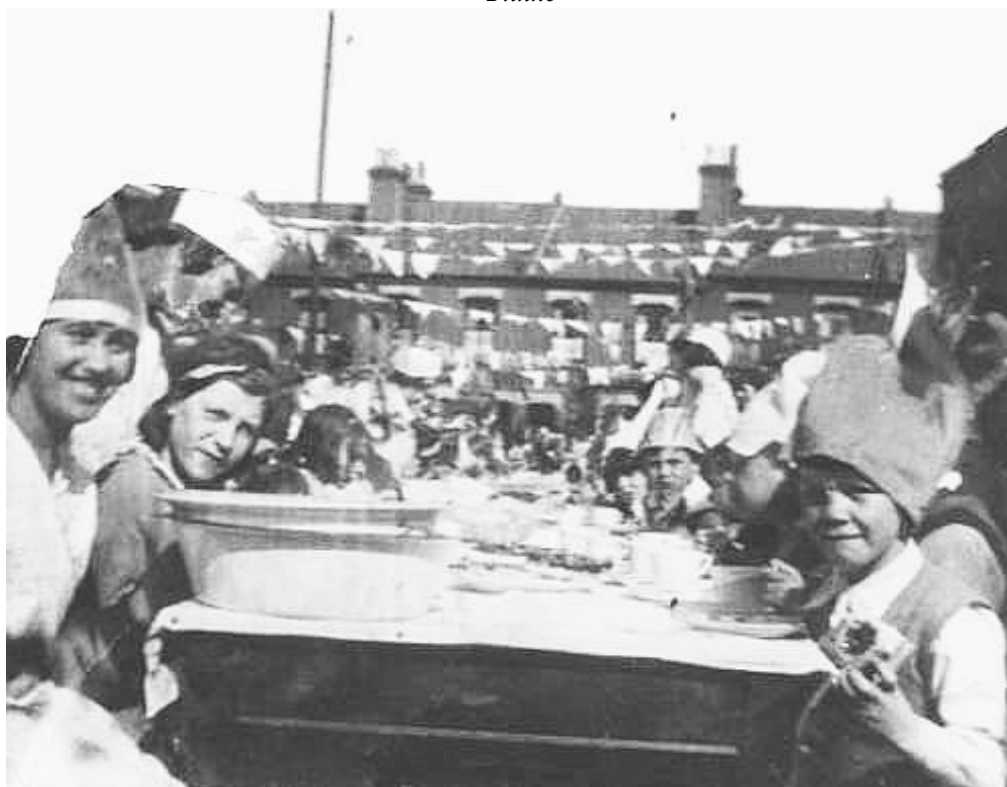
# *Street Parties, Special Events & Gatherings*

*Compiled by Colin Weightman*



*Fancy Dress Party, during the Coronation Celebrations, 1953, held for the children who lived in the Prefabs on Wynn's Common.*

*See story: Growing Up In The Prefabs On Wynn's Common. Photos: Barbara Biddle*



*Jubilee Street Party, Reidhaven Road, Plumstead, 1937?*

*Photo: Joyce Hyne (nee Foster)*



*Helen Jones says; "This is a picture of my grandmother and granddad (marked with X's) It was probably celebrating the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 and is in Ancona Road". Photo: Helen Jones.*

*My grandparents lived in **Ancona Rd; Plumstead (Orchard Rd)**. Their house was a large old 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 are just out of shot.*

*The very end of the road came under Welling - Kent. There was a line, which went across the road and the pavement to divide 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?*



*Coronation Street Party, Barth Street, 1953. Photos: John Singleton.*



*Coronation Street Party (1953) in Barth Street, Fancy dress parade.*

*John Singleton is fourth from left second row, holding dish mop and baby, going as, 'Don't forget Fathers Day' (as it was on Father's Day). "My mother painted a black eye on me and gave me a big lipstick kiss on my cheek".*



*Durham Road Coronation Street Party (1937).*

*The photographer was S. Paine of 2A Brewery Road, Plumstead. Derek Bowden says his uncle, Dennis Bowden, is the schoolboy, third in from the right, first row, with the school cap (Conway). Do not know any of the others. His grandfather lived there before moving to Piedmont Road. Photo: Derek Crompton*



*VE Day Celebration, Donaldson Road, Shooters Hill, Woolwich.*

*Roy Earnshaw is on the first bench from the left, fourth from the front, that is the left hand side of the bench nearest the edge of the photo. His brother, Eric, is on his right hand side and next to him is Peter Gayle and his brother Derek.*

*Opposite Derek on the same bench is Kevin and three along on his right is Howard James. Roy and Eric Earnshaw's parents are amongst the adults. Photo: Roy Earnshaw.*



*Derek Crompton says:*

*"The photo was taken 6th June 1953 at the Queens Coronation party in the Waverly School building (now demolished).*

*I am in my mother's arms in photo.*

*Photos: Derek Crompton.*



*Coronation 1953 fancy dress party, Plumcroft Primary School.*



*Plumcroft Primary School. School play 1954.*

*Photos: Roger Edwards.*



*Plumcroft Primary School, School play. 1954.*



*Cha-a'-banc outing, Prince Albert Pub, Ragland Street, 1920's.*

*Photo: Clare Crawford.*



*Plumstead charabanc outing – mid 1900's.*

*Photographer S. Payne located at 89 Piedmont Road, Plumstead.*



*Tramps' Supper Ascension Hall on Winn's Common c.1956. (Double Eight Youth Club.  
Photo: Ken Costin.*



*Lakedale Road in 1907. Whatever the event or the reason why all the children are gathered here I  
have no knowledge of. Photo: Alan Gibbs.*

# *Surviving The 'Doodlebugs'*

*Len Holiday*

My family remained living in Admaston Road, Plumstead Common from the outbreak of war until we were finally made homeless in 1944. Our house was situated about 1½ miles from Woolwich Arsenal and about half a mile from the Optical building, which manufactured telescopes, binoculars and so on: prime targets for the German bombing campaign. We led a pretty normal life throughout the war, watching dog-fights in the skies, playing in bomb craters, helping dad on his allotment and doing things kids did, mainly getting into mischief, for which we were duly punished.

Then, one Thursday in August 1944, the air raid sirens sounded at approximately midday. My mother was getting lunch ready, as my father was due home at 1pm from his job in bomb damage maintenance.

Mum had told my sister, who was ten years old, and me, to go into the garden and listen for approaching aircraft. Being children, we didn't do as we were told. A little later she came through from the kitchen to find us reading comics. She became angry and told us to do as we were told. We had a Golden Retriever (Bob) who always waited for everyone to enter the Anderson shelter in the back garden before coming in himself.

On this occasion as soon as the back door was opened he ran straight down the garden into the shelter. On seeing this, mum just shouted, 'Run! Run!' We had all only just got into the shelter when there was an enormous explosion and there was dust and dirt everywhere. After a short while everywhere was quiet. We climbed out of the shelter to find that the house and a number of others down the road were no longer there, just a heap of bricks.

A doodlebug had hit our house. The unusual thing about it was that the engine did not cut out prior to the impact. We found out later that it had actually come straight through the front door of the house and the nose was found alongside our shelter in the back garden. Not five feet from us! My father arrived in the road a little after the explosion and thought that we were all dead. In his words, "No one could have survived that!" He just stood there not knowing what to do when he saw climbing over the rubble a Golden Retriever. He knew then that we were safe and he came to find us.

One of our neighbours who would not use their shelter was found bending over the pram that contained her baby. Both, incredibly, alive! Her son, the same age as me, could not be found. Eventually though he was found. Apparently, just before the bomb hit, his mother had pushed him up a chimney in the house. The rescuers got him out uninjured.

Unfortunately, my best friend was killed in a shop just up the road. It was after this, as we had nowhere to go, mum, my sister and I were evacuated to Liverpool. My dad remained with Bob, our dog, in Plumstead doing war damage work. The sad ending to this, apart from my friend being killed, is that on our return from Liverpool, after about four months, we learnt that dad had given Bob away to his employer. We never forgave him!

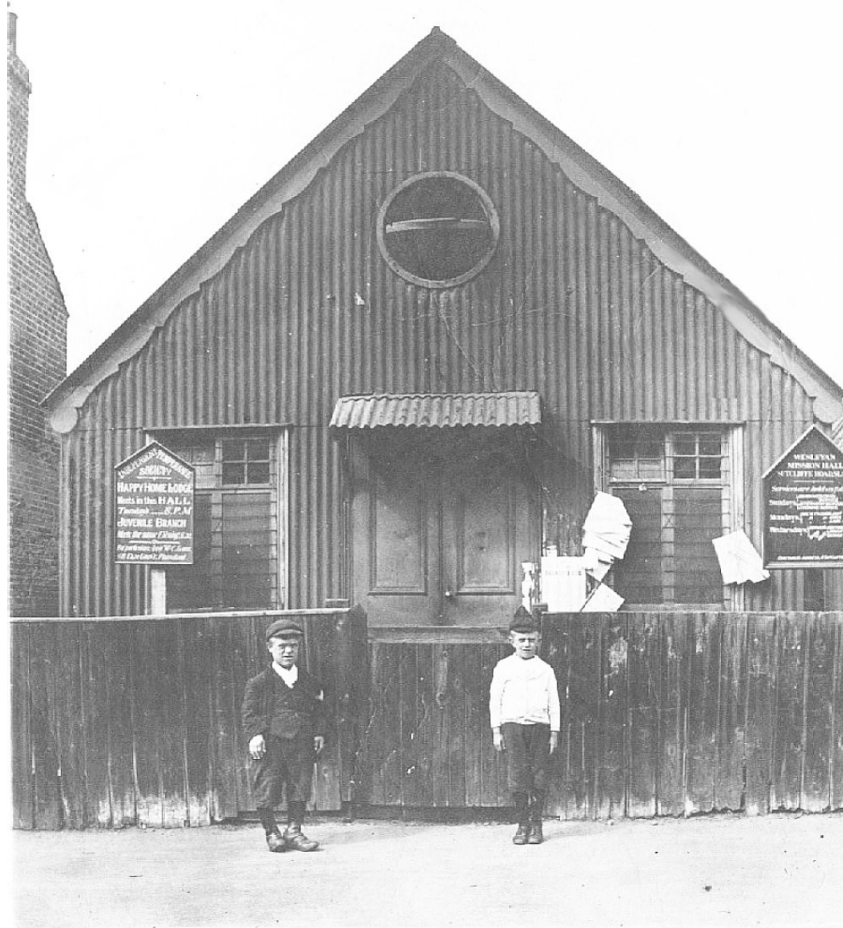
*Thanks to the Plumstead Common Environment Group for their kind donation of this story.*

# *Sutcliffe Road*

*John Miles and Lily Smith*

Lily Smith, who is over 80 years old (2006) and who owns the photos has added names, dates and places, as she has tried to recall them.

With the help of a friend, John Miles, she recalls the following facts.



The picture of the church hall was taken in Sutcliffe Road about 1918. The little man on the left is Alf Hall and the other is his friend, a boy Fred Smith. Alf worked at Mackintosh's mineral works as maintenance engineer and, because he was smaller than most, he was able to get into very tight places. Mackintosh's were situated near the bottom of King's Highway.

The church notice board on the left says:

*'Independent Temperance Society'  
Happy Home Lodge  
Meets in the Hall  
Tuesday pm  
'Juvenile Branch' .... (The rest is difficult to see)*

The right-hand notice board says:

*'Wesleyan Mission Hall' .... (The rest is difficult to read)*

The photo below is of Sutcliffe Road. The 'x' marked on it is above No 14 where Lily Hall lived for 50 years after her sister Rose Hall got married to George Selves. The date of the photo is about 1918.



The photo below shows a close up view of the milkman, who is attending to a customer at his milk hand cart in Sutcliffe Road in about 1918. It also shows the large milk churns on the milk cart. A young boy is walking along the path towards the milk cart with a can in his hand to get the daily supply of fresh milk for his family.



*Close up of Milkman with a customer and a boy approaching with his milk can.*



*The group of three children standing outside the house with the bay windows are Stan Smith and his sister Grace and his brother Alf. It was taken in St John's Terrace in 1923. Lily Smith later married Stan, who is on the left of the picture.*



*The photo with the gas lamppost is outside No 7 Sutcliffe Road, I believe, and the two people are grandfather Hall and the friend with the Merchant Navy uniform is, we believe, Fred Wig, the date would be about 1918.*

*All these people are related to Lily Smith through marriage to Stan Smith.*

*The following Victorian street scenes show children playing in Sutcliffe Road around 1880.*



*The below photo is a close up view of the young girls with the baby in the ornate wickerwork pushchair. It shows detail of how the children dressed in their typical Victorian/Edwardian style clothing. Below, Closer view of the young children in sailors' outfits and the little girl with her hoop.*



Lily is over 80 years old and sometimes gets a bit mixed up, I know what its like and I am a lot younger than her.

John Miles. (2006)

This last photo shows how Sutcliffe Road looked in the late Victorian times.



All photos with kind permission of Lily Smith via John Mles.

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**ONLY 5 COUPONS**  
 In Rayon worsted fabric, with two pockets. Grey or Navy. Waist sizes: 24, 26, 28, 30 ins.

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**LADIES' HOLIDAY SKIRTS**  
 in All Wool Check Tweed. Smart swing style, with three pleats in front and one at back. Colours: Green / Brown / Yellow, Pale Blue / Brown / Green, Blue / Brown / Yellow. Utility. Waist: 24, 26, 28, 30 ins. Hips: 36, 38, 40, 42 ins. (6 Coupons) **20/-**

*Post and Packing 9d. Please state second colour.*  
*Basement, Ladies' Skirts*

# *That Soccer Game!*

*Mark Weightman*

Remembrances of playing in the Conway Primary School Soccer Team, 1949.

My memory stretches back 57 years... to a wet and windy Saturday morning when I failed to score for our Conway Road Junior and Infants School soccer team.

There was quite a good turnout of parents, family, neighbours etc. Our Headmaster, a Justice of the Peace, Mr Cyril Bull, a large distinguished gentleman, was also in attendance. Our school was recognized as a force on the soccer field. But in my time we had not defeated arch rivals Wood Hill School of Woolwich. From previous seasons' games the scores were: 0:0; 1 all draw; and a 0:1 loss.

On this particular morning, it was very wet and our opponents Wood Hill were goalless at half time. Our Sports Master, Mr Lovatt instructed me to remain as deep as possible around the half way line and to watch out for the offside trap. The resumption of the second half found Wood Hill pressing for the winner with our defence under pressure. They were well drilled and their lone defender kept me close to the half way line. However, the one and only chance presented itself, a long ball from our defence. To this day I remember the screams and shouts from our supporters and how it alarmed me, I even glanced their way. But, with the ball at my feet I rounded their lone defender making good ground goal-wards on that heavy muddy pitch, only to shoot weakly for their advancing goal keeper to smother the ball; he must have thought it was Christmas!



*Football team, Conway Primary School c.1949.*

*Mark Weightman is on the right, kneeling.*

*Back row: Mr Lovatt, Mr Cyril Bull, Headmaster, and Mr Gilder.*



Conway School Football Team 1949.

Back row, left: Headmaster Cyril Bull. Mr Mockeridge.

Standing: Ronnie MacMinnermin (Goalkeeper) .??. ?? Colin ? Dean.

Kneeling: Gordon Jeffries, Colin Lever, Mark Weightman (with ball). ??, ??.

If only I'd tried to round the goalkeeper with even a penalty chance. I have relived the experience many times in my life, remembering also the disappointment on my father's face. Also Mr Lovatt's with hands on his head looking skywards and the resignation of our dignified Headmaster, Mr Bull. I also remember a remark from a team mate's older sister as we carried the goalposts and crossbars back to the park keeper's hut, "But Mark is usually so good!" Well that morning 57 years ago was so very wet and in those days the ball was heavy enough without the added moisture that its untreated leather absorbed.

Yeah, should have taken it round the goalkeeper.

P.S. I was the youngest ever to play for Conway Road at 9 years of age. My school soccer hero was a bloke named Brian Dumford who was two years older than me. He would let me play during the dinnertime football games in the playground. Brian was of course in the school soccer team before me.

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 Chest size 24in. Ages 4 & 5  
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 Chest Size 26in. ages 6, 7, 8 & 9  
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**Youths' 'Imitation Harris' TWEED SPORTS JACKETS**  
 48/2.5.—Simple-cut, made throughout. Plain, blue, brown and grey. No waist contrast.  
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 Size 7, age 7, 8 & Coopers; ages 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20  
**30/4**  
 Size 8, age 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20  
 Size 9, age 11, 12 years  
 Size 10, age 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20  
 Size 11, age 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20  
 Size 12, age 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20  
 Size 13, age 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20  
 Size 14, age 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20  
 Size 15, age 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20  
 Size 16, age 16, 17, 18, 19, 20  
 Size 17, age 17, 18, 19, 20  
 Size 18, age 18, 19, 20  
 Size 19, age 19, 20  
 Size 20, age 20

**Youths' Union Flannel Trousers**  
 48/2.5.—Belt loops. Made for easy wear.  
 Sizes 7 to 18  
**17/2**  
 With turn-up, belt and extended waistband. Sizes 7 to 10, ages 12-14, 15-16, 17-18, 19-20, 21-22. Post 2/-  
 Sizes 7 and 8 & Coopers. Ages 10 to 12 & 13  
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 48/2.5.—Soft, light, made in front and one centre back. Contrast colour front and back. Powder Blue, Royal Blue, The, Claret or Lime Green. Hips 36, 38, 40in. Waist 24, 26, 28in. Length 24, 24, 24in.  
 Only 4 Coopers  
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# *The Bandstand*

*Julia Cowdell*

On the site now occupied by the Adventure Playground was a beautiful Edwardian Bandstand. On Sundays, in the summer months, the Royal Artillery Band often gave concerts and seats for the audience were placed on the terraces near the Pudding Stones. Residents in Blendon Terrace would often listen to the concerts from their front gardens.

Sadly, tastes change and the Bandstand was no longer used and fell into neglect. In the 1970's it was encompassed by the Adventure Playground, but having lost its real function it was vandalised and eventually was demolished. Many people regret this loss of our heritage.



*Listening to the Bandstand, 1905.*

*Photo: Greenwich Heritage Centre*

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

# *The Beginning Of The Plumstead Make Merry*

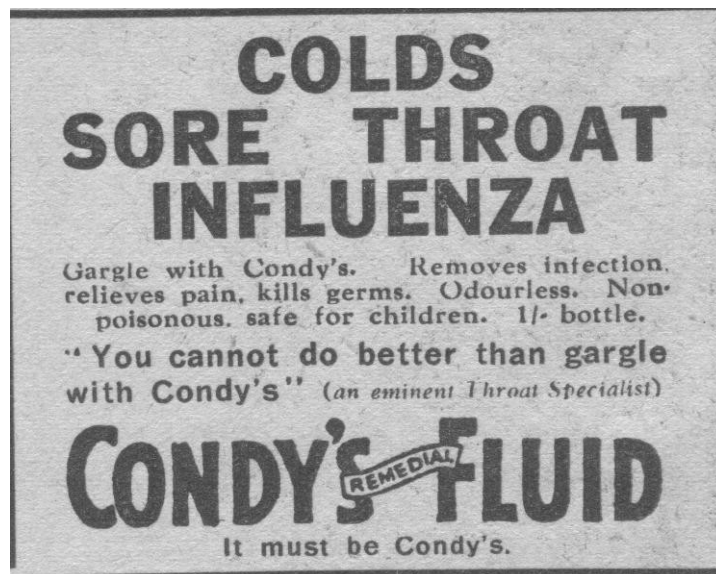
*Barbara Fitch*

This was the brainchild of Martin Auckland, a warden at Shrewsbury House and Mike Giddings of Plum Lane. They were employed by the Council. They invited organisations and leaders of various local community groups to an open meeting at Trinity Church Hall, Burrage Road. I had started the Ascension Playgroup in 1968 with Sheila Hall. I'd become interested when I could not find a suitable playgroup for my daughter. I joined the working party of the Plumstead Make Merry and was assigned the task of researching at Woodlands Local History Library as to where fairs and community gatherings had taken place.

Midsummer was the chosen time of year. But nothing could be found for Plumstead Common. An annual fair had taken place in lower Plumstead, around the area of St Nicholas Parish Church. That became known as a "Make Merry." So Plumstead Make Merry was chosen as a light-hearted community gathering. A competition was organised to design a logo. A working party was set up to silkscreen and print T-shirts. All local groups were encouraged to take part. The T-shirt printing took place in Plumstead Manor School. Jean Ellis and Jeanette Swinfield were also involved and activities took place in the Cub/Scout headquarters in Waverley Road. Later Jeanette Swinfield took over the task when Martin moved on.

2000

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



# *The Birthday Party*

*Bert Hooper*

I well remember one of my birthdays when Colin Weightman, Robert Beecham, and myself were walking along Kirkham Street near the fish & chip shop, opposite from the Working Man's Club. We often walked that way to Fanny On The Hill, as a change from the same old route along Swingate Lane.

Kirkham Street joined Swingate Lane, near Morgan's the flower shop at Camdale Road.

It was a nice quiet walk along by the cemeteries and Rockcliffe Gardens. Or to walk down King's Highway, cutting through the cemeteries or the gardens.

Across the road from The Working Men's Club was where my uncle John Greenwood and aunt Vera lived with my older cousin John.

Being a brazen little bugger, I knocked on her door, told her it was my birthday, and she returned to the door in a matter of seconds with half a crown!

The three of us turned right at Flaxton Road, cut through Alabama Street to Garland Road, walked up the Hill to Shrewsbury Park, walking past the Army Optical Station, and sat in the park wondering what to do with soooo much money!

We ended up at a little café at the top of Plum Lane, got a drink each, some sweets, and sat looking out at the view.

In the distance we could see the giant Ford sign on the factory over in Dagenham, and a Blue Star Line ship about to enter one of the docks. I will never ever forget Robert and how all he really wanted was a cup of tea.... such simple needs in those days.

We walked back along the dirt road to the top of Garland Road, eating dusty blackberries we picked as we made our way. I seem to remember Robert holding me up so that I could grab a few apples from off a tree near the allotments up there.

I'd never had a birthday party until that day, as we were too poor I guess, but I've never forgotten how great it felt to share my newfound wealth with my mates.

By the way, we had a banana milkshake each (pretty runny) and a Palm toffee bar.

No wonder I needed all kinds of fillings by the age of 13.

By the time we all got home, my ears and neck were sunburned to a deep crimson colour.

A good day out, but that was all us Common kids could afford, and we now know that we were richer than most Kings and Princes.

Knowing that we had very little, made us value each other in a way that is oh too rare today and it gave us the desire to share what little we had with each other.

That's why we remember those days, because we had peace in our hearts and we lived our lives to the fullest.... just as God wants us to do!

# *The Blitz Kid That Stayed Behind*

*Derek Boswell.*

In 1938, when I was six year old, we had recently moved to Ingledew Road and I went down with scarlet fever. In those days this was a serious disease and could have fatal consequences. I was slapped into the Brook isolation hospital for the next five weeks. I was allowed no visitors at all, devastating for a six year old. The Brook later became a general hospital and is now no more.

I was put into an isolation ward for contagious diseases, e.g., diphtheria, scarlet fever etc. Normally, a scarlet fever attack lasted about three weeks, but in my case I was told I had developed an ear infection and was incarcerated for a further two weeks. At the age of six, I couldn't write, which for me at the time was the only means of communication with the outside world. Fortunately though, there were older people in the ward (the old Nightingale style of ward) and I told one of them what I wanted to say and the letter was sent to my parents. Usually at that age all I was interested in was what they could send me in. Each day, they would come and leave a parcel of some sort at the gate, which would then be distributed the next day to the ward. It was high summer when I was in hospital (the usual season for scarlet fever) and older patients had the option of sleeping on the veranda at the rear of the ward. The Brook was situated in Shooters Hill, and in those days there was open grounds towards the south. When I was finally released I recall that it took me a while to become used to my parents and my brother again.

The War Years.

I was not evacuated during the war and stayed in Plumstead right through. Not much happened until September 7th 1940. This was a Saturday if my memory serves me correctly, and I was visiting my grandparents with my mother. My grandparents lived in Villas Road that was very near to Woolwich Arsenal.



*Charles Boswell and eldest son during WW1. Charles Boswell was my grandfather, a qualified wheelwright and coach builder, in charge of Royal Artillery workshops, training apprentices at Woolwich Artillery Barracks.*

A large air raid started that day and we heard and saw large numbers of enemy bombers coming towards London and obviously following the river. Woolwich Arsenal was virtually opposite to the Royal group of docks and both were presumably a target. We heard many bombs being dropped and could hear the sounds of aerial combat above. The thing I remember particularly was the sound of shell splinters or shrapnel hitting the road outside. There was no air raid shelter in the house and we simply stood in the hallway alongside the staircase. My cousin Freddy, who was in the navy, was also there. (He was, shortly afterwards, killed at sea).

I had several relatives (uncles) working in the Arsenal and one of these came home sometime

during the afternoon saying that the conditions in the Arsenal were chaotic and very frightening, with people sheltering under railway trucks etc.

About 5pm there was a lull in the raids and my mother said we should hurry home to our house, which was at that time in Ingledeew Road. My most vivid memory of that day is the red glow in the sky from the fires that had started in the Arsenal and in the Docks.

That night was the start of the London Blitz. Later on, the Council constructed an Anderson air raid shelter in our back garden and we spent that night and many others therein during the winter of 1940/41.

Schools were closed during this time but some attempt was made to give us some sort of lessons in the school staff room, for those of us children who were not evacuated, but this soon petered out.

One time during the daytime, during September it must have been, my mother and my brother and me were in our shelter when we heard sounds of an aerial dogfight in the sky above us. Suddenly it sounded



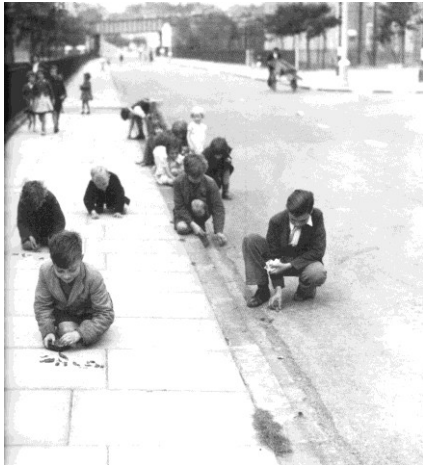
*Families installing their Anderson air raid shelters in their back gardens.*

as if something was going to land on us. It turned out that a German 109 fighter had been shot down and had landed on an Anderson shelter in Robert Street. I believe that the occupants were killed. The Red Cross, I think it was, charged everyone a penny\* to go through the house and view the wreckage on top of the shelter.

During the Blitz, I recall many premises being bombed throughout Plumstead, and I particularly remember Tower House in Heavitree Road. I believe this had been a doctor's residence. Such properties were invariably left empty and open, despite the possibility that to enter them could be dangerous. This however did not deter us boys from investigating, where we found huge numbers of stamps (mainly British Victorian). Evidently, the occupier had been an avid stamp collector. We investigated many such bombed buildings with varying degrees of interesting finds. One property I particularly remember was Bulgin's the Butchers shop, on the corner of Glyndon and Southport Roads. We heard about it through the grapevine the very next morning and investigated straight away. We found the emergency services on site going through the debris. Nobody was injured in this bombing and in fact Mr Bulgin carried on his business in another shop on the opposite corner.

Every morning after a night raid we would comb the streets looking for shrapnel. I amassed a fair collection of shell splinters that I kept in a shoebox. Richard Dodd had a spent bullet that he told me he found on his windowsill.

After the Blitz and before the advent of the V1 and V2 flying bombs, the war years in the



south east of England quietened down. Those children that had not been evacuated, or those that had returned from evacuation, as many had, found almost all the schools closed for most of the time. During this free time us kids roamed around.

*Children collecting shrapnel after the night raids.*

One of our favourite pastimes was to visit the Woolwich free ferry. The ferryboats then were the old side loaders. I can recall their names: there was 'Gordon,' 'John Benn,' 'Will Crooks' and the 'London'. There were normally three of these running at any one time, with the other being out of the water nearby, presumably being overhauled. It was obvious that operating these boats was quite skilled, as the tides ran strongly at Woolwich and you could see the boats being carried up or down river as they crossed, depending upon whether the tide was flowing or ebbing. Us boys would spend many hours staying on the boat going to and fro, a lot of the time below the passenger deck, where it was possible to look in on the engine room and watch the open pistons moving back and forth as they powered the paddle wheels on either side.

I remember that at the height of the London Blitz, in January 1941, my father was called up. He had to report to the RAF at Blackpool. My uncle, who was working in Woolwich Arsenal, managed to get some time off and somehow, despite the petrol rationing, hired an old car and took him along with my mum and my brother to London where dad had to catch the train. I think it was Euston or one of the other stations in that area. There had been a heavy air raid the night before and we had a tremendous job to pick our way through London to the station from south of the river. There were still many fire fighters and rescue services and other emergency services running about and a general air of chaos prevailed. On other occasions, when we took dad back from leave and had to go by train and use the underground, there were people preparing to bed down for the night on the platforms.



*Families sheltering in the London Underground subway stations.*

Some of the boys and girls that I remember at Earl Rise School during the war years were: Richard and Tommy Dodd, twins Kenneth and Ronald Clark. Robin Shreeve, John Pennell, Derek Doye, Denis Bassett (later mixed up with villains, and his body was fished out of the Channel), Bill Wakeman, Jack Pearce and Jim Pearce (my cousins,) Stanley Colgate, Peter Dominy and Melvin Daws. The girls I remember (these were mixed classes,) were Doreen Wall, Doreen Duggan, Sheila Bartlett, Jean and Pam Rolfe and Audrey Barthorpe.

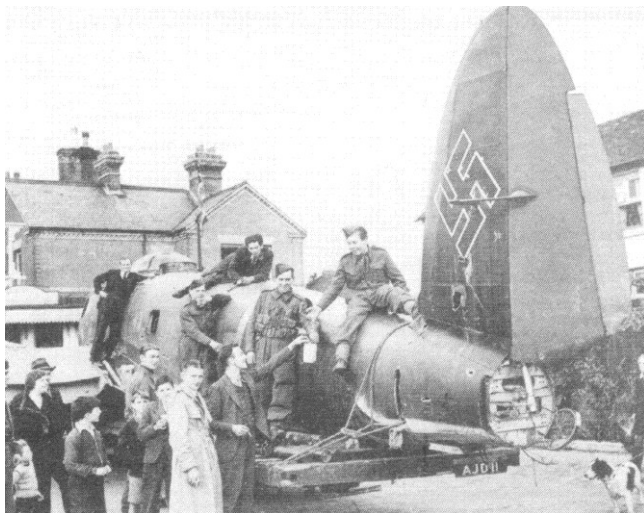
At Conway Road where I spent some time during these topsy turvy years, were, Denis Cherry. Bill Long, Bill Green, the Meekums brothers, Derek Gale and Derek Driver. . Headmaster was Cyril Bull who was a J.P.

After the war I recall going to the Valley to watch Charlton Athletic play.

Most of the boys at Ancona Road School were supporters of the club. During their 1945/6 season they were having a good run, and they had a mid week fixture at the Valley. I asked my mother if I could go and she agreed. It was played mid week, in the afternoon. It had to start quite early as in those days there were no floodlights, and this was in wintertime. If I recall correctly, it was a sixth round FA cup-tie during the 45/46 season, and they were playing, I believe, Preston North End.

At school next morning the Headmaster, Mr Gilham, said, "Stand up all those boys who went to Charlton yesterday." To my surprise about 50% of the morning assembly stood up. I expected the cane but realised he couldn't cane all of us. Instead, he said, 'I want notes from your parents on this table tomorrow and woe betide any boy who played truant without their permission.' Next day there was the biggest mountain of notes I have ever seen on his table. I wondered what he would do. In fact all he did was to dramatically sweep all of them onto the floor saying, "I cannot understand your parents allowing you to lose schooling to go to a football match!" That was the last we ever heard of the matter.

They won the match and went on to the cup final at Wembley for which a mate of mine (Sid Marsh) was lucky enough to get one of the cheapest tickets, 3/6d I think it cost him. Charlton lost the final that year but the manager, Jimmy Seed, vowed they'd be back the following year, when they were and they won, I think by the odd goal. If my memory is accurate one final was against Derby County and the other against Burnley, but I am sure, however, these facts can be checked.



*\* Collecting money at crash scenes was used for the Spitfire Fund and other War Effort requirements such as the Red Cross.*

*Pictured: A small donation was asked for to view this shot down German bomber.*

# *The Bowman's Hollow Killer*

*Albert Richard (Bert) Hooper*

British Columbia. Canada.

When I was about eight years old I made a catapult (slingshot) and like most of the other boys in our little gang I became somewhat of a marksman. As we had been born into a world that was still recovering from the horrors of war and, because we were bombarded with the stories of glorious battles, it was not unusual for us to play with all kinds of homemade weapons.

One day, instead of playing hand grenades on the bomb sites by throwing pieces of bricks at each other, we all decided to walk across Winn's Common and play medieval war games in Bowman's Hollow. On the way to our so-called 'Battle with King John in Sherwood Forest' we stopped at different locations and filled our pockets with nice round stones with which to attack anything that moved. As we entered the leafy canopy of Bowman's Hollow we all started firing stones in every direction, loudly proclaiming another Norman soldier killed. Every leaf that moved was fair game and any tree that stood still long enough had its trunk bombarded with a shower of missiles resembling the sound of many woodpeckers. The woods echoed with our young excited voices as the frenzied slaying reached a fever pitch.

Suddenly, and without even thinking, I raised my catapult and shot at a bird that was swooping towards a large tree. Before my stone hit its target I was already leaning to one side and turning on one foot in an effort to make it wander off into space and miss, but, to my horror, I was too clever for my own good that day and the bird fell to the ground, dead. Everyone in the gang declared that I was truly the best marksman that they had ever seen and praised me as some kind of hero for hitting a moving target. One freckle faced little boy, who was probably no more than five years old, marvelled at the worms that had fallen from its mouth and asked to ask me if I could teach him how to shoot a catapult when he got one.

On the other hand though I was in total shock at what I had just done and felt weak all over with fear. As we started walking back across Winn's Common towards our homes on Lakedale and Sladedale Roads, a sick feeling deep down in my stomach started to get worse and so I quickly ran the rest of the way home on my own. This also allowed me to hide my true feelings from the rest of the gang and not appear to be weak. Later, that evening, as I lay quietly in my bed, alone with my thoughts, the shocking truth began to sink in. As I thought about the events of that day, a cold chill crept through my body as I realised that the small bird that I had killed that very day had been in carrying food back to its nest for its hungry youngsters. They were probably cold and starving by now and would, more than likely, not make it through the night. I may have been a great hero in the eyes of the gang that springtime day, but in my heart my feelings of self worth were in complete turmoil; I was now a killer of one of God's innocent little creatures and also of other innocents too.

The following day I hung up my catapult for good and spent most of the school holidays that summer inventing ways of staying away from the gang. The shocking experience that had

taken place because of my own foolish actions changed me forever, and I became acutely aware of so much more of the natural beauty of Plumstead Common, Winn's Common, Bowman's Hollow, Bostall Woods, Bostall Heath, Abbey Wood and Rockcliffe Gardens.

I grew to really appreciate Plumstead Common, and I spent many hours there thinking about my future, before I emigrated to Canada in 1968. It is amazing how few places there are in the world that allow access to all the things that Greater London offers, while still providing a person with the ability to stroll for hours through woodlands and heaths. I always felt so fortunate to be able to just simply go for a long walk and escape the hustle and bustle that was, and still is, Plumstead High Street and Woolwich districts.

The whole area around Plumstead Common is of such importance to the natural environment of South East London, that it should be treasured and nurtured at every opportunity.

Because of my young catapult experience I feel compelled to fully support the education of our young children about the responsibilities of being good stewards of our natural environment, whatever part of the world we live in. Had my early childhood years included more of these simple lessons, I'm sure I wouldn't have had to carry the baggage of my shame and guilt around for so many years. I'm a retired man now but I have not forgotten the lesson I learned, all those years ago in Bowman's Hollow.

Twenty five years later, and what at times seems like another planet, I moved to a small hobby farm in Maple Ridge, which is in the Western Canada Province of British Columbia. Our children loved the thought of having lots of different farm pets and before long a menagerie of cats, pigs, rabbits, geese surrounded us, including chickens and ducks. The whole homestead was supervised by the watchful eyes, nose and ears of our very large malamute, who did a fairly good job of keeping the property safe from marauding raccoons and coyotes.

In an effort to increase the numbers in our different flocks, and guarantee fewer eggs and young ones wouldn't fall prey to the extremely swift aerial attacks of crows, eagles and hawks, I purchased a very large electric incubator.

Springtime came, and before long fertilised eggs were being laid in more hiding places than I thought were possible. I saved the different breeds of eggs in an old spare refrigerator until it was time to load up the incubator with that particular breed of egg and start the process of life.

In the incubator the eggs were turned twice a day and a small amount of water was sprayed on them to allow for the expansion that takes place as the embryo grew inside the shell.

At about the four-week mark tapping sounds from inside the eggs indicated that the inmates were about to make their 'break' for freedom. The next two days were probably the most exciting of all, as most of the eggs cracked open and the incubator was suddenly full to bursting with four dozen or so little fuzzy wonders. The whole family got into this in a big way and before long we had batches of goslings, chicks and ducklings emerging in endless waves.

As I was inspecting a fresh batch of ducklings one day I found one that was stuck to the

inside of the shell. In the struggle to escape it had somehow pulled most of its lower intestine out of its rear end. It was very small compared to the others and was just laying very still with its little eyes closed, seemingly waiting to die. For some unexplained reason I suddenly remembered the little bird in Bowman's Hollow that I had killed over thirty years previously. I became acutely aware of a little voice inside of me, urging me to somehow find the right path this time, and heal me of my shame.

After thinking about things for a moment I went into the bathroom and filled the sink with lukewarm water. I returned to the incubator and, very carefully, removed the duckling from the rest of the shell. I carried it to the sink. I held the duckling's head above water and gently swirled the warm water around its rear until the shell floated free and all traces of debris had been washed off. Then, with hands trembling, I very gently massaged its rear end back inside its tiny body until things started to close up and look normal. I fed the duckling with an eyedropper full of vitamin formula for small birds. After drying it under a heat lamp I returned it to the safety of the warm incubator.

Over the next few days I continued feeding it with the eyedropper and nursed my little friend over all kinds of hurdles, including an eye infection. By the end of the week it was running around feeding itself and generally making up for lost time. As you can imagine I was a real hero in the eyes of my family. I felt really good about myself with the opportunity I had been given, to help save a life this time.

I suspect that a higher power had indeed given me that opportunity to relive my moment of murder in Bowman's Hollow, because that higher power truly knew how penitent I was about what happened in the past.

As most of this happened during the 1986 period of Lent, Easter that year held an extra special meaning for all of us, as we each became a witness to the real miracle of life, a true treasure!



# *The Boy And The Country Tramp*

*Colin Weightman*

Being a short story about a young Common kid and an old gentleman of the highways and byways.

I love silver birch trees and when I see a mature one I often remember back to a time and place when I met a special old gentleman. He was an old country tramp whom I had met and befriended as a wee Common kid. He was a little old man and his clothes were equally old and patched. He was a 'gentleman of the road', a breed of men that has long since disappeared, evaporated into the misty past.

I met him one sunny summer's day as I was walking up the track that wound its way up past the fence of the paddling pool and play area on Winn's Common, opposite Goldsmid Street. He was sat on the hill in the long grass under the dappled shade of the silver birch trees that grew next to the dirt path that wove up the hill. He was eating his lunch. With a Common kid's smile I said, 'allow!' and he smiled a toothless grin back acknowledging me. I started talking to him and pretty soon we were good old mates. With his soft unhurried voice he told me that he, "Travels around the countryside going many a mile in his journeying, living here one day by the woods and then may be there by a river another day." I was fascinated by his travelling stories and his kindly lined and crumpled old face when he smiled as he told his tales to me.

I always kept an eager lookout for him after that first meeting. If he was there I would go and sit silently next to him and listen intently as he told me some more of his many fascinating travelling stories.

He would always share his sandwich with me, as we sat in the long grass as the summer breeze gently swayed, rustling the finely twigged branches of those silver birch trees, beneath which sat two plain old common folk, just enjoying the simplicities of life.

Unfortunately though, the old gentleman disappeared, just as quickly as I'd found him, after those few brief enjoyable meetings. I never ever met with him again, though I would always scan the horizons of the common in the hope that he would be sitting there, having his lunch in the shade of those trees.

Yes, those were indeed simple old Common days... of long ago... fading memories that we are lucky to have and to share... common thoughts... from Common folk.



*Colin aged 4, back garden, Sladedale Road, Plumstead 1948.*

# *The Evening Of The 7th And 8th Of August 1954*

*Bert Hooper*

How could I ever forget! We were all glued to the radio late in the evening of 7th August 1954. History was made, and the following day the BBC television showed that great moment in the evening on a film that had been flown all the way from Canada. We had a television at No.77 and so it followed that Colin Weightman, David Morrison, Charlie Roberts & Robert Beacham came over to watch and marvel at history being made. Although we'd all heard the outcome on the radio the previous evening, there was something so special about seeing this moment with our own eyes.

The place was Empire Stadium, Vancouver, British Columbia, right next door to the PNE (Pacific National Exhibition) grounds. Roger Bannister stayed in front of John Landy, and became the first human to have knowingly broken the 4-minute mile record.

I say knowingly because there were a few times on Plumstead Common, when we'd been eating cherries, apples, blackberries, and oh sooooo soft fallen pears, that our dash back home must have broken a few records, and a few times even the public toilets at the Paddling Pool or the Slade were just too far out of reach! Thank God for the bushes on the Common!

The crab apples at the Ascension Hall were just too hard to handle, however in later years my aunt showed me how to make the best crab apple jelly in the world.

Every time I drive along Hastings Street in Vancouver, I glance over at the statue of Bannister's & Landy making history. I often think back to the time when all my Common old mates were gathered in our middle room, with a bag of SMIFF'S CRISPS doing the rounds, and me Bruv Tony sharing out a cheap bottle of Macintosh's Lemonade from their yard just off King's Highway near the Alma Tavern.

I watched the Vancouver Whitecaps become North American Soccer Champs in the same Empire Stadium, and I've watched lots of British Columbia Lions, football team games from a seat not too far from that statue. I've seen lots of other great things in my life, as I'm sure you have, but I'll never forget 8th August 1954 when all of us Common kids were sitting together and cheering for a common hero!

We are told that athletes of today would be 120 yards ahead of Bannister in a similar race today. We were a million miles ahead of most people today, because we were just so excited to watch a film of the event, and to be with each other.

As everyone was leaving, one of the gang accidentally kicked some empty milk bottles down the steps. My mum swept them up without complaint, as she was happy to see us all getting along so well.

What a day that was! What a gang of friends! What a memory to cherish, even after 50 years!

# *The Great Thames Disaster*

*Gavin Thurston*

## **Extract from book**

A brief account of the sinking of the paddle steamer Princess Alice on Tuesday 3rd September 1878 with the loss of over 600 lives: The worst ever Thames disaster.

The paddle steamer 'Princess Alice' was one of many pleasure steamers working the Thames in the late nineteenth century. Named after Princess Alice, Grand Duchess of Hesse-Darmstadt and the third daughter of Queen Victoria.

Tuesday September 3rd, 1878, was a warm sunny day and about 700 day trippers were enjoying a round trip from London Bridge to Sheerness, with several stops along the journey. As the Princess Alice made its way back up river in the evening, passengers prepared for disembarking and the band packed up their instruments, it was the end of an idyllic day. It was about 7.45pm, dusk was falling, and the lights of Woolwich came into sight as the Princess Alice rounded Tripcock Point and into Gallions reach.

Shortly before this, a coal ship, the 'Bywell Castle' had left Millwall dock, bound for Newcastle after having been re painted. Both Captains were very experienced, and the Bywell Castle also had a Thames pilot aboard. As the Princess Alice came into Gallions Reach, the two captains saw each other's vessels. The pilot of the Bywell Castle was moving at half speed down the middle of the river and observed that the Princess Alice appeared to move towards the north shore and steered his own ship slightly to the south shore. Meanwhile, aboard the Princess Alice, Captain Grinstead could see the Bywell Castle and assumed it would give way.

As the two ships bore down on each other, the pilot of the Bywell Castle could see that a collision was inevitable and gave the order to reverse engines full speed, but it was too late. The giant steel collier quickly sliced the Alice almost in two and within five minutes the paddle steamer slipped beneath the waves taking hundreds of souls to a watery grave.

Now a ghastly fight for survival was beginning, made worse by the awful state of the river. Sewage and industrial waste was at that time dumped untreated into the Thames. A few managed to swim to safety; others clung to floating debris and waited to be picked up by rescue boats. In all, only 69 were saved. The exact number of dead is not known, but the most accurate estimates put the figure at around 640. Thames Watermen were paid five shillings for each body they recovered from the river.

The inquest that followed lasted for 10 weeks and ended with a verdict of death by misadventure. A board of trade enquiry concluded that The Princess Alice was to blame for the accident for various reasons. On Monday September 9th, thousands of people turned out for the funeral services, at Woolwich Cemetery. A large Celtic cross still stands to this day on the site of the graves, paid for by donations of sixpence received from over 23,000 people. Five years later, the Bywell Castle sank without trace in the Mediterranean.

*\*The full story of this incident can be found in an excellent book called 'The Great Thames Disaster' by Gavin Thurston, published in 1965.*

# The Fire Watch

Chris Ford of the Greenwich Heritage Centre

*on behalf of James Liddle*

I lived on Majendie Road during the war and my father was in charge of the fire watch roster. We all had to take our turn fire watching because in September 1940 they tried to set London alight with incendiary bombs. At one time they were rolling down Griffin Road, Plumstead, like sticks of rock! After that, we then had the air raids and then the shrapnel came down. AA guns used to come around the streets firing at the enemy aircraft and you could just hear the 'ping ping ping' of the shrapnel coming down. We survived the bombing. One afternoon, my father, Kitty's father and myself, were just by the air raid shelter in the garden when a German plane crashed into the next road.

At the end of Majendie Road, adjacent to Griffin Rd, they built great big concrete pillars to stop enemy tanks in case we got invaded.



*Rooftop Fire Watchers WWII.*

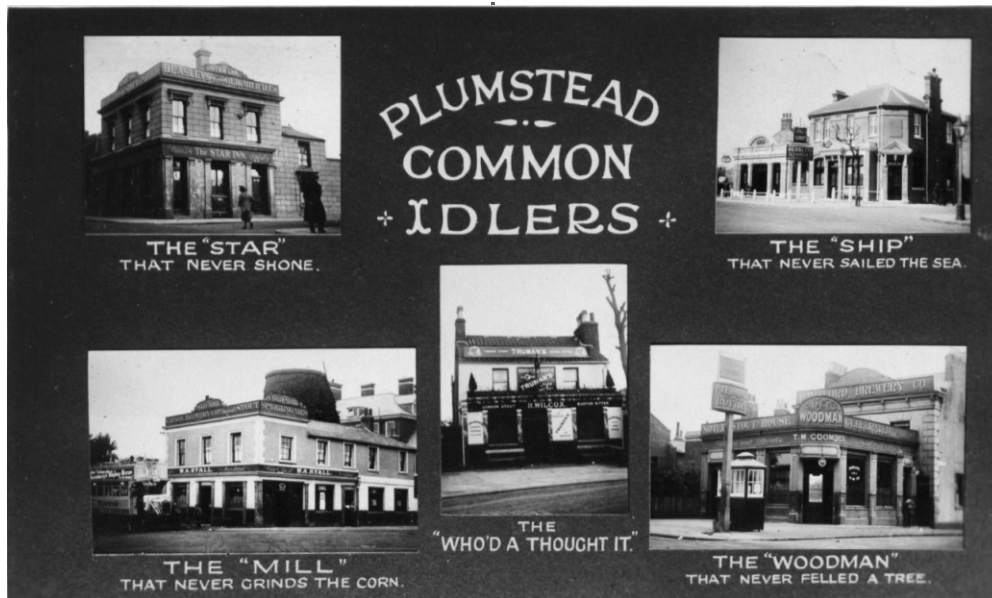
*Editor: Photo was added to story.*

*'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)'*  
*The Five Idlers Of Plumstead Common*

**KIDDIES' BARGAINS**  
Kiddies' knitted Breeclette Sets (Coat, Tunic and Leggings). Made in good soft wool with contrast stripes at waist. Sizes to fit 1 and 2 years. In pretty shades of Almond, Saxe, Rose, Fawn. Usually 6/6 and 6/11.  
**Sale Price 5/-**  
No Post Orders.

Kiddies' Three Piece Velour Sets (Coat, Hat, Leggings). Made double breasted and half belt at back. In pretty shades of Saxe, Marina Green, Red. Sizes to fit 2 to 5 years.  
**Lengths**  
of cc 15 18 20 22  
Usually 10/- 11/- 12/- 13/-  
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**Clearance of Children's SHOES**  
Various Children's styles, including Oxford Lace, Plain One-bar, etc., Walking Shoes and delightful assortment of Party Shoes in One-bar styles (with heel or without), cowhide leather or brocade. These are our own regular stock lines.  
**3/-**  
No post. All reduced to **Second Floor.**



*The Five Idlers of Plumstead Common.  
Photo: Dierdre Terrant.*

The Star which doesn't shine in the sky,  
The Woodman that never felled a tree,  
The Ship that never sailed the sea,  
The Mill that never grinds the corn,  
and Who'd a Thought it!

Of course some of the pubs have changed their names, as is the modern trend.

With thanks to Toby and John King London Transport history site. [transporthistory.co.uk](http://transporthistory.co.uk)





*The Woodman.*

*Photo: David Tarrant. 2005.*



*Sadly, The Ship Public house being demolished, on Plumstead Common, and is now no more. It reopened for a short time in the late 1990s as the 'Commoner's Rest', but closed shortly afterwards. It only lasted a few months when it reopened as 'The Ship' once more in about 2000.*

*Photo by kind permission [www.derelictlondon.co](http://www.derelictlondon.co)*

# *The Flash Flood Of 1955*

*Graham Day (Hopper)*

I can remember the storms and floods that occurred in 1955, when the ravine lake on Plumstead Common flooded and overflowed in torrents down into Roydene Road. Also, what with the huge amount of water flowing down Tormount Road as well, this all added to the huge volume of water and the resulting flood damage of many houses in the area.



*Storm damaged trees by the ravine pond. Colin Weightman and others are chopping firewood. In the background his sister Ann and the younger Beacham girls are looking at the Slade pond over the fence. A lot of the houses in Lakedale Road were also flooded out during this storm.*

A big gate on the back of Dickins shop was taken off its hinges and was swept all the way down the road.

I was about nine years old at the time and it was really frightening for me.



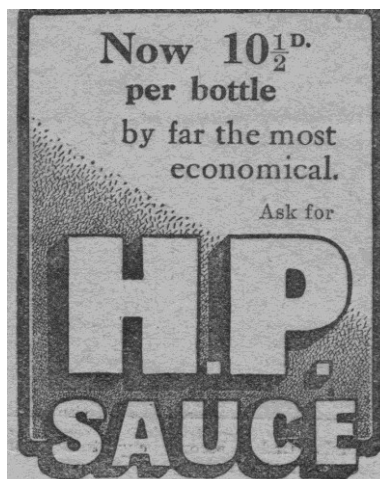
*Early view of Ravine pond and Roydene Road.  
The houses on the left (backs of) are on Tormount Road.*

I was living on the hill in Tormount Road and I had just gone down to Mr Haywood's house, in Roydene Road. He was a bus driver and I was there to pick up the tickets for a day trip to the seaside with my family at the weekend. I literally had to hang on to the walls and the railings to get back up to my house and being only nine years old at the time I honestly thought that I was going to be swept away down the road and be drowned.

It had only taken me five minutes to walk down the road, but it took me nearly an hour to get back home!

The flood only lasted for about three hours. It just came from nowhere, then, it just stopped and the sun came out. But it had caused a whole lot of damage in that short amount of time.

A lot of the trees came down by the ravine; one went through the garage roof of the man who later was to become my father-in-law.



# *The Giant Rats Of The Slade Ponds*

*Albert Richard (Bert) Hooper*

At the south end of the Slade Ponds is the inflow pipe that comes from the junction collector manhole just across Plumstead Common Road from the playground next to the Slade School.

As children, our loving parents were always telling us to stay away from this pipe. They said it was because of the dangers of rats, and also the various diseases that flowed, with precipitation runoff, from the higher ground in the direction of Garland Road, Shrewsbury Park and Shooters Hill.

As many of you know, this is not the best way to deter the curiosity of children, which is why this pipe always became the goal of many expeditions into the world of the unknown.

During a visit back to Plumstead Common, I gazed down at the pipe from the top of the steps near Tormount Road, and wondered in amazement how we all managed to ever crawl up that darn thing.

Our goal was to see if the stories we had heard were true, and that it was indeed possible to make it through to other similar pipe locations, such as the intake of The River Plum, near The Glenmore Arms.

In later years I found out that the Glenmore intake pipe just simply went the short distance under the housing estate, reappeared by some allotments, and then disappeared into a culvert through the rubbish and land filled Plum Valley near The White Horse Pub (Fanny On The Hill). It came out near Wickham Lane, before heading north towards Church Manorway, the marshes, and the Thames.

You would just die if you knew what they buried in that valley when they put the Plum River into a culvert pipe for almost half a mile.

From the vantage point of my father's allotment, near the cemetery wall off of Camdale Road, I'd watch the slow destruction of the valley. The daily arrival of dozens of dustbin lorries via a temporary entrance off of Wickham Street always kept the seagulls, crows, rodents, and human scavengers busy.

I've often wondered what type of toxic cocktail juice leaches through the joints of that culvert pipe, from all that decaying Bexleyheath and Welling rubbish, now that the seals are no doubt ageing.

I guess that pipe is too new for any legends to have grown. A few may get started though when future archaeologists start to dig in and around the banks of what they think is the River Plum.

The Slade pipe however had all kinds of stories attached to it, and our famous foray into the darkness only added to the mysteries.

It had been a very dry summer, for a change, that year, and the grass on the common was tinder dry.

Since then I've only experienced dryness like that in the Okanagan region of British Columbia, the province in Canada where I now live.

The dryness provided the grasshoppers with a perfect environment with which to flourish to a population level that made them almost a nuisance.

The feeling of those darn little critters jumping up the inside of your short trousers was not much fun for even the bravest of explorers, so the coolness of the Slade pipe was very inviting.

Because of a lack of any precipitation for some time, the level of the Slade Ponds was very low, which made our access to the inflow pipe so much easier that hot afternoon.

We hung around the entrance for some time, going through the motions of checking what little gear we had, passing orders back and forth as to who was going first, and generally delaying our departure, no doubt because of our collective unspoken fear.

After quite a long time, and more displays of procrastination, we all looked at each other's pale faces, and with some anxious glances silently agreed that the moment had come.

With a type of squatting duck walk we entered the pipe, and with the use of many bicycle lamps, which we had tied around our foreheads, like Welsh miners, we made our way slowly into the darkness and the direction of the Slade School.

I did glance back at the small amount of daylight at the pipe entrance, and I'm always reminded of that exact moment every time I watch the opening credits of all the James Bond movies.

Voices from the other gang members, who remained at the entrance of the pipe, echoed easily in the confined space, and combined with the shuffling sound of our feet inside the cool damp pipe to make one hell of a racket.

After a while we started to hear the very close trickle of water, which made us think that we were getting very near to what had been described by previous explorers, as the huge chamber, or gallery, where pipes came from all directions.

I don't know who it was that stepped on the first rat, or even how many there were, but the sudden screeching of what sounded like an army of huge rodents, stopped us dead in our tracks for a split second.

I think that the pipe was something less than three feet in diameter, but we all stood up straight and rigid.

When four-foot tall boys stand up straight, inside a three-foot pipe, you know that there has to be collateral damage to various locations on the scalp!

So it was with Olympic speed that we made the painful return flight from danger, all the while bashing and crashing into each other, and the sides of the concrete pipe, as we went.

On seeing our blood soaked faces emerge from the darkness with such speed, and our mad dashing around in circles, all the while jumping, screaming, and thrashing about, it gave all those present the impression that huge rats had attacked us.

Many of the facial, arm and hand scratches did resemble something that might have been

inflicted by an army of animals, but I'm thinking now that most or all of our very minor injuries had been the result of our record breaking disorderly exodus from hell.

The heat of the afternoon, and the sweat on our skin, only made the blood and grime combine in such a way as to make any theatrical make-up artist envious.

In a very short period of time the news of our expedition had made it to many parts of Plumstead Common.

With each retelling however, the length of the pipe and the size of the rodents grew bigger, much bigger!

One such version, from a school chum at Plum Lane Secondary School spoke of the pipe going all the way to Eltham. Had he no understanding of how far that actually was?

Another version, later told to me at the Woolwich Polytechnic Secondary Technical School, spoke of an old pig, from Clubby's Farm off of Bassant Road, as being a resident of the pipe; no doubt hiding from the slaughter house taxi service!

A choir member at St Marks Church said that he'd seen an old badger limping into the pipe one evening. This news did make my heart miss a few beats with the thought of an angry badger having potentially been right in my face!

A few of the bullies at school started to think twice before they tried to have a go at any of the expedition members, so we left well enough alone.

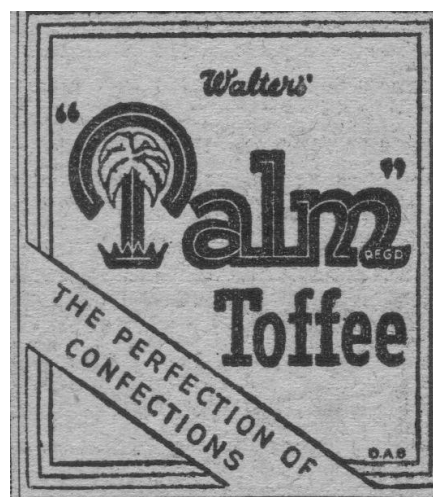
Why spoil a good story if it keeps your butt out of harm?

Many parents used the story to reinforce their feelings about their little darlings going near the pipe, but once in a while news of other expeditions, and their experiences, brought chills and shudders to my body.

Even the big storm in the late 50s, that filled the ponds with so much debris, did not rid the pipe of whatever it is that lives up there.

Over the years, around Guy Fawkes Day, many rockets have been launched into that pipe, and always with the same results, shrieks and squeals from its many residents.

I never went back, and I don't think you should!



# *The Gosling Family, Plumstead*

*Bev Connolly (nee Gosling)*

My family moved to Brewery Road Plumstead from Lower Pelliper Road, Charlton, just after the First World War. They lived in number 43 until 1957 when they moved to Orpington. My grandmother, Florence Gosling, was very active in the WVS, both during the war and afterwards. She ran a Darby & Joan Club in St Paul's Church Hall. She had a great sense of community responsibility. She worked in the Arsenal during WW1, in munitions, and at some point, I believe, she was also a prison visitor. My father Jack and his brothers, Leonard and Arthur, attended Earl Street School, but my Uncle Bert (Herbert) attended the Open Air School at Shooters Hill, which later moved to Charlton Park.



*Woolwich Arsenal Women Munitions Workers around WWI era.*

*Photo Spike (Hubert Manwaring-Spencer).*

Both my mother and father worked at the Seimens factory, which is where they met. Dad was a keen motorbike rider. They married in St Paul's Church, in October 1940, and I remember them telling me that there were several air raid warnings that day. They set up home together in the basement of number 43. In 1943 my sister Hilary was born at Moatlands, in Paddock Wood, where mum had been evacuated to have her baby. This is now a golf club and my sister tells me that she was born in what is now the shop!

My father and his brothers all served in WWII, dad and uncle Len were in the Navy, uncle Arthur was in the Army and uncle Bert in the RAF. My grandfather, also Arthur, had been in

the RA during WW1 and was an air raid warden in WWII. Uncle Arthur lived with his wife Lily in Congo Road. My eldest son lives in this house today. (2007) I was born after the war, in 1946, at the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies. We moved to the Coldharbour Estate when I was two. We visited Plumstead to see my grandparents every week and I will remember the bombsites and the air raid shelters on the Common. I remember a shop in Brewery Road run by Mr & Mrs Lambert. I think you could buy almost anything there.

When I was eleven I passed the 11 plus and was accepted at Kings Warren School. My grandparents had always wanted me to go to this school so I used to make the long journey each day, by two buses from Mottingham. I used to love walking through Woolwich market coming home from school, especially close to Christmas, when the lights would be lit on the stalls and everything seemed so bright and cheerful.

My uncles and my father all survived the war but their cousin Jackie (John Frederick) did not. He was a pilot on the Lancaster bombers and was reported missing, presumed dead, after a mine laying raid on the Frisian Islands, in March 1943. He was the only child of Emily and John Atkins who lived in the schoolhouse at Charlton Park Open Air School. Great uncle Jack was the caretaker for many years until they retired.



*My uncle and aunts wedding in 1936 – Arthur John William Gosling to Lilian Margaret Last, at St. Paul's Church, Plumstead.*

*(It shows all my family apart from my mother who probably took the photograph)*



My parents, Jack and Ellen Gosling. I would think this was taken about 1938.

MEMORANDUM

London County Council

Name of School  
EARL STREET L.C.C. (B.) SCHOOL  
S.E. 18  
WOOLWICH, E.

Reference.....

14. 4. 30

Jack Gosling has attended this school in a regular and punctual manner for the past seven years or more.

He bears a very good character and I have always found him to be reliable & obedient. He reached the junior section of the top class, six months ago and has worked in an able & intelligent way.

He has taken a keen interest in all branches of school sport and has proved himself to be a good all-round boy.

I can recommend him with confidence

H. J. Bartholomew. Class Master.  
W. J. Harris. Head Master.

My father's testimonial from Earl Street School in 1930.



*My father's Life Saving Certificate, awarded in 1929 when he was 13, from the Borough of Woolwich Lifesaving and Swimming Club.*

My aunt Lily Last's testimonial from Earl Street School in 1927. It is hard to read so here is a transcript:

*Lily Last has attended this school regularly and punctually for six years and is leaving from Standard CXV11 at the age of 14 years.*

*She is a girl of very good mental ability and excellent conduct.*

*Her handwork is especially good and she has just been successful in passing the Preliminary Trade Scholarship Exam.*

*I can most strongly recommend her and am sure she will do her best to give satisfaction to her employer.*

*(Signed) N Pyle, Head Mistress.*

# *The Great Adventure Lands Around Our Commons*

*Colin Weightman*

A young childhood's adventure-filled years, enacted out on Plumstead and Winn's Commons, as only a young boy's vivid imagination could, during the late 1940's early 1950's.



Have you ever jumped out of a moving train and roly-poly with your mates down a steep grass bank, over and over, faster and faster, till you get to the bottom of the slope, dizzy and laughing and racing back up to the top to do it again; have you?

Have you ever lain on your back in the long grass with a friend, looking up at the giant fluffy clouds and seen faces and horses and puppy dogs and castles and other creatures and other wonderful things in those ever-changing billowing cotton wool, fairy tale, clouds up yonder in the big blue skies of your childhood; have you?

Have you ever hunted for tigers in the undergrowth and the bushes of the jungle, where, at any moment, a wild animal could pounce on you and tear you to pieces; where you have to stay so very quiet, so very alert, crouched down, gripping your rifle ready to shoot; stealthily moving through the dangerous jungle; have you?

Have you ever galloped at full pelt on a very fast horse, where speed is paramount because you're being pursued by Red Indians and, if they catch you, they will surely kill and scalp you, as you gallop and slap the horse to go faster, holding on tight to the reins, as you turn and aim your six shooter and blaze away at them Red Skins, Blam! Blam! Blam! Have you?

Have you ever sailed in a stormy sea, where huge waves crash and wash over you as you head into the angry turmoil, when your boat keels over dangerously and you are almost swamped, but you manage to survive, sailing on at last into calmer waters, the wind pushing you ever faster, speeding you on your way; have you?

Have you ever explored dark caverns where evil creatures live and lurk in the dark, ready to grab you if you don't keep a very good look out, where you really rely on your mates to keep ever vigilant, to warn you if there is something nearby, to trust in them to get 'it' before 'it' gets you, bravely going onwards and ever deeper into the dark unknown; have you?

Have you ever had to hide from the enemy, not daring to stir, when they were so close you were afraid to breathe in case they heard you and found where you were. Where you lay so flat, squashed to the earth amongst the shrubs and the tall grass with the sound of the enemies' feet getting closer and closer and your heart beating faster and faster; have you?

Have you ever flown a kite so high in the sky that you imagine you're up there instead, just like a bird looking down on the world, and the wind wants to tug you aloft as you wrestle and heave with all your strength on that so very long and taut line, as it soars and weaves this way and that then spirals around; now you are a fighter pilot chased in hot pursuit, looping the loop to get out of the way of the enemy's guns; have you?

Well I have, and quite often at that, and yet I managed to survive all those dangerous adventures and more, though bruised and battered and bleeding sometimes, but that was to be expected when life was lived to the full whilst playing such adventure packed days on those great green expanses during those young Common childhood days of yonder years.



# *The Hospital Grounds*

*Colin Weightman*

## **St. Nick's Hospital grounds**

I remember the Hospital grounds more than their gardens, which were situated further down towards the hospital buildings. The grounds themselves were the wonderfully overgrown area that we kids played amongst and was accessed by crawling under the high wire fence that began at the end of the high brick wall that was built around the entire perimeter of the St Nicholas Hospital.

This fenced area was supposed to be an out of bounds place to the general public. So for us kids we felt we were exploring a forbidden land when we played in there. This added somewhat to this mysterious wonderfully overgrown and unkempt tangle-weeded area.

It had lovely big old sprawling oak trees growing at the southern end. There were lots of other well-established large trees and shrubs situated around the fence line. In the middle of all this was a big expanse of very long untamed grasses, of many varieties, along with many other kinds of small shrubs. It truly was a wonderful place to play in, especially for hide and seek and to make secret huts in amongst the long grass and the tangled shrubs, or just to look at and explore nature, quietly and undisturbed.

Yes indeed, a very special place that lay in a small shallow valley surrounded by the Common, undisturbed by the public. A quiet private place that allowed our young imaginations to act out some of our childhood dreams...our very own secret hidden garden.

*Footnote:*

*The Plumstead Common Environment Group (PCEG) has been gifted this piece of land and is preserving it for the publics future enjoyment.*



# *The Huxstep Family 1871-1917 & Onwards*

*Barbara Lloyd (nee Burt)*

## **From Publican to Fish Hawker to the Royal Arsenal.**

My grandma Parsons who lived in Plumstead triggered off my interest in family history. My mother met and married a Royal Artillery soldier and travelled to India to be with him. I was born in India and on our return to England in 1944 we lived with my grandmother in Bloomfield Road. I went to the school across the road, and a recent visit to the area showed the school being developed into flats. I can remember the Express Dairies Factory, behind Bloomfield Road, also being taken across the Woolwich Ferry, (for whooping cough), being sent to Burrage Road School and having to have a sleep in the afternoon (which I hated).

Tales told to me by my mother about uncle Walter who died in France (in 1917) and her own father (Enos Ryan) who went to war in 1914 when she was only two and was killed in action. I was also told that my great grandmother used to have a sweet shop in Fenwick Street. I believe that Fenwick Street has been demolished; I have identified an entry in Kelly's Directory 1922 showing Walter Joseph Huxstep as a Confectioner. I have still to research when and what has replaced it.

My search of Census etc. has found out the following information.

Walter Huxstep (my great grandfather) is shown in the 1901 census as being a Fish Hawker on his own account. I often wonder would the trade of Fish Hawker be similar to the man with a van from Grimsby selling fresh fish. I know Walter had a horse and cart and that he tethered the horse on Plumstead Common. I am told that when he died the horse broke loose from his tether and came to the house in Fenwick Street. (A lovely thought – but true?)

The 1891 census shows Walter as a General Dealer, and the 1881 census shows him as an assistant to his father who was the Licensed Victualler of the Earl of Moira public house, in Shooters Hill. This was a story that had not filtered down the generations, and came as a complete surprise. So why did Walter leave the Earl of Moira and become a Fish Hawker/General Dealer? Maybe the Earl of Moira could not support additional family and the need to earn a living was essential.

Walter was married to Henrietta and they had five children, one being Adelaide, who was my grandmother. Adelaide married Enos Patrick Ryan and was left a widow in 1914 with Margaret age four and Edith age two (My mother). In 1914 she married Frederick Parsons. I still haven't traced the Ryan family; Patrick my 2-x great. grandfather was in the Royal Garrison Artillery. His wife was a Hooper and the children were James, Enos and Catherine. I think both James and Enos worked at the Royal Arsenal and the Woolwich Dockyard.

Or indeed Frederick Parsons, Adelaide's second husband, he worked for the Royal Arsenal. I remember tales of him visiting the market on a Friday and regularly bringing home fruit for the family. But they were not allowed to help themselves; they had to wait to be given it. I also remember not being allowed to use grandma Parsons front room; the chairs had brown paper over them. Sundays only!!

My father was invalided out of the Royal Artillery and we moved to his home in Cheltenham, but all our holidays were spent visiting grandma Parsons. These visits covered a period from 1944 to about 1960. All in my formative years. I still have happy memories of Plumstead.

Walter's children were Henrietta, who at 17 was a Finery Ironer, as was Florence aged 16. Walter at aged 14 was a Furnace Labourer at the Royal Arsenal. Maude and Adelaide at twelve and nine years old were shown as scholars.

Walter (the only son in the family) enlisted in the East Surrey Regiment and was killed in action in February 1917. He has a marked grave at Hem Farm Cemetery Monacu, Northern France. Walter's Father never recovered from the loss of his Son.

The census of 1871 shows Walter's father, Joseph Huxstep (My two x great. grandfather, born in 1830 and married to Elizabeth Anne Padgen. They had nine children, three of whom were employed within the public house. Again I believe the Earl of Moira has been demolished and I am still trying to find out when, and I would love to find a photograph of the tavern which is mentioned on the Gen Doc site of old English taverns.



# *The Kent Cup Final 1947*

*Allan Bristow*

The Harvey's Ladies Netball Team beat Stones 17-14 in a cup final (possibly The Kent Cup) played on Plumstead Common in 1947. The game was played in the area of the common near Old Mill Road and Warwick Terrace.

Harvey's were at one stage losing 7-2, I think, at half time, but eventually won 17-14.

I cannot recall the full names, but as follows:

My mother was 33 at the time and was the oldest team member.

I used to go with my mother to support Harvey's. I was ten at the time of the cup final.

Harvey's and Stones were situated in Woolwich Road, Charlton.



*From left to right, back row: Madge ? (Sister of Vera), my mother Florence Bristow, Vera Sweet  
Front row: ?, Louise, with cup, Vera?  
Doreen ?, the Captain was not in the picture.*



*Early style newspaper heading from 1930.*

# *The Local Corner Shop*

*Colin Weightman*

Every one had his or her local corner shop. A place that, as a kid, you were often asked to, "pop down to, or along to, across to, or up to," on an errand, to fetch a packet of Woodbines or something for mum, or for an elderly neighbour. If you were lucky you might even get a penny to spend on some sweets for yourself for doing the errand. When sweets could be bought for a farthing each; a penny could purchase four sweets. Sweets such as Blackjacks, at a farthing each, or Bulls eyes, at a halfpenny each, that's two for a penny, a cushion shaped rather strong flavoured black and white striped boiled sweet that lasted for ages if you sucked it, resisting the urge to crunch it up. You could buy a slab of Palm toffee for, was it tu'pence! A chocolate biscuit 'Wagon Wheel', that seemed as big as a tea plate, for, I think thru'pence; but they've shrank down in size over the years. The sherbet dips were another favourite. Served in a small paper bag with a twisted top and a liquorice straw protruding through. Suck up the delicious sharp tangy sherbet powder through the straw and when it was all gone you ate the liquorice straw. In these little bags of sherbet you'd find a small metal 'good luck' charm; perhaps a tiny horseshoe or some other miniature goody that us kids eagerly looked for when the sherbet was all gone, would be a choking hazard today.



The small bars of Fry's chocolate were another favourite of mine; a special treat at thru'pence a bar. I recall the changing faces of the Fry's boy depicted on the back of the chocolate wrapping. The first boy's face has a very distraught tearful face; the second face a slightly less tearful face; and so on until the fifth face shows a happy smiling face as he gets his bar of Fry's chocolate. This thru'penny bar also got a lot smaller as the years went by and up in price to sixpence a bar. It eventually disappeared!



*Left to right: Penny, Halfpenny, the four farthings = one penny (1d).*



*Mr Dickins behind the counter, note the grand show of Easter eggs on the counter.*

Many other old favourites disappeared as time marched on. Palm toffee was one, bought in the individual slab of toffee, or bought broken into pieces from a much larger slab. It was broken up with a little toffee hammer and then weighed out at so much an ounce. Most sweets were sold by the ounce, and our rations of sweets were generally bought in two-ounce amounts of this or that. Gob Stoppers were another favourite with us kids. At a penny each they were quite big and they lasted for ages and ages. As the large ball in your gob was sucked it changed colours, as it had multi-coloured coatings. Us kids we were forever taking them out of our mouths with our grubby little hands to compare with our mates what new colour was showing and guessing the next colour to show. These big Gob Stoppers were eventually banned because kids were occasionally choking to death as they ran around with them in their mouths. Another nearby local corner shop sold liquorice-sticks that were actual

twigs of wood. They were around a penny for a small bundle of about four twigs. You chewed these liquorice soaked sticks until all the lovely liquorice flavoured juice had been well and truly sucked out, leaving just a wet pulp of well chewed-wood fibres.

An early observation from the 'Booth early Police books' for Plumstead in 1900 says, "The streets are straight & empty & clean except when the children tumble out of school and leave a litter of small paper bags which once held pennyworth of sweets or fruit." ...Nothing has changed, 'cept the prices' and fewer corner shops!

The following story is by kind permission from an article by the 'IDEAL HOMES: SUBURBIA IN FOCUS - A joint venture of some London Boroughs including the University of Greenwich'.

*\*'The corner sites of many roads in the new suburb of Plumstead were occupied by either a shop or a beerhouse. The Beerhouse Act of 1830 allowed a householder, on purchasing a licence for two guineas (£2.10p), to sell beer from a room in the house. In addition to the beerhouses purpose built public houses were also constructed. The Lord Herbert in Herbert Road was built c.1870 on the edge of the Herbert Estate. Most of the public houses in Plumstead belonged to the North Kent Brewery on the corner of Lakedale Road and Brewery Road.*

*However, the oldest public houses like the Volunteer and the Plume of Feathers were, of course, in the High Street at the heart of the old village.*

*Corner shops like those at the northern end of Herbert Road and Acacia parade were convenient for local families but, inevitably, it was the main shopping areas in Woolwich, Woolwich Market, and Plumstead High Street that were the biggest draw for shoppers from Plumstead.'*

Our local corner shop was called Dickins' and was situated on the corner of Goldsmid Street and Sladedale Road. A lovely elderly couple, Mr & Mrs Dickins, owned it.

They were related to the Dickins who had their own shop in Parkdale Road who also later owned another shop on the corner of Parkdale and Sladedale Roads (ex Welsh the Greengrocers) that was run by Lennie Dickins their son. Dickins' was a typical corner shop. To us kids it was known as 'the sweet shop'. These shops had that recognizable corner shop smell, a familiar aroma that all these little shops shared in common. A bouquet of smells that incorporated hints of soap, paraffin, sugary confectioneries, kindling wood, mothballs, cheese and other subtler smells. These shops were often stacked up, with high shelves that reached the ceilings. An array of large glass jars, each labelled jar containing a myriad of different coloured sweets for our young eyes to feast on, whilst we pondered on what to get with our penny held tightly in our hand.



Mum, Maureen Weightman, with Dickens corner shop in the background. (Corner of Sladedale and Goldsmid Roads)



I remember going on an errand for mum to get a bar of Lifebuoy soap from our corner shop. The red coloured soap, about six inches long, with 'Lifebuoy' embossed on it and roughly moulded with no wrapping paper. On purchase, it was wrapped in a piece of newspaper, as was the bar of yellow 'Sunlight' soap used for washing the clothes and the floors. I loved the smell of Sunlight soap on Monday washing day, but the smell of Lifebuoy soap was not so nice, as it had a stronger carbolic smell.... and did it 'arf sting ya' eyes when ya' mum washed ya' face wiv'it! This soap was nothing though when compared to the dark red bar of 'Carbolic' soap that really did mean business when that came in contact with your eyes and other orifices!

My younger sister Ann remembers that it was every Saturday morning that our dad would leave our pocket money for us on the living room mantle shelf. She got thru'pence and I, being three years older, got sixpence. Every year on our birthday we would each get a rise of thru'pence in our pocket money. When we went to spend our pocket money at the corner shop to get our weekly meagre amount of sweets we had to take our ration books along with us. When I had selected my sweets I remember the elderly Mr Dickins would cut out of the ration book, with a big pair of scissors, some squares with amounts printed on each square which indicated your weekly sugar ration allowed for that week. Many other items were on ration after WWII and were still being rationed into the early fifties. When sugar rationing ended in the early fifties there was such a rush of folk buying sugar and confectionery that it was put back on ration again. Sweet rationing finally ended on February 4th 1953 and all food rationing ended on June 3rd 1954. To us kids in those days it was so good to be able to go and buy sweets without any rationing restrictions. You can well imagine what it was like for our parents as well, when all these forms of rationing finally came to an end.

Not that us young kids had much money to spend in those days. But, at least when you did manage to buy some sweets they sure tasted that much more delicious. Dear old Mrs Dickins, she would wait very patently behind their well worn wooden topped counter whilst pint-sized four year old me pondered over what to get with my halfpenny, or perhaps three farthings, held tightly in my hand. Then, when the big decision had been made, she would take down and unscrew the lid off of the selected jar, reach in and count out into my hand the sweets; then, with thank you's exchanged, away I'd trot, mouth watering in anticipation of the tasty morsels I was about to devour. My sister recalls the time that our mum sent her to Dickins' on an errand. It was winter time and she was all wrapped up to go and mum said, "Don't loose the change" as mum pushed the money wrapped in a note with what to get into her glove. She got the item and was crossing the road and slipped in the deep snow and lost the sixpence change in the snow.



*Early photo of Lakedale Road corner shop, at the top of the junction of Tewson Road.*

Nervously she explained to mum how she had lost the change. But mum said to her not to worry about it. When I over-heard them talking and learned that sixpence was lost in the snow I took the hearth-shovel and shovelled the snow looking for the sixpence. Mrs Dickins came out of the shop and asked me what was I doing. I explained that my sister had lost the sixpence and I was looking for it. A few days later Mrs Dickins was talking to mum and told her about me digging in the snow for ages looking for the lost sixpence. My mum felt quite embarrassed about this as she thought Mrs Dickins thought that mum had made me go and dig in the snow for the sixpence. However, that sixpence to me was well worth looking for. Another time my sister was heading down our front steps as our dad came along. Dad asked her where was she going and she said to Dickins. He ask her how much did she have to spend and she said, " a ha'penny". Dad gave her another couple of pennies, as he didn't want her going there with just a ha'penny. But it was no problem at all for us kids to go to the shop with only a ha'penny; no embarrassment whatsoever!

However, I remember a very embarrassing incident that occurred at another corner shop just down the road from our local shop. I had gone into this shop to buy some sweets on my way home from school. As I entered, 'Ping, went the shop door, jingling the bell. I stood at the counter and waited for the lady to come out from her living room, which was just off of the shop. But no one came. I opened and shut the shop door again, jingling the bell again. I waited and still no one appeared. I was just a kid and I was at eye level to all those marvellous sweets, all so temptingly lined up right before my eyes! After a short deliberation, between right and wrong, I quickly grabbed a hand-full of sweets and crammed them into my tiny thieving gob. At that very moment 'PING' went the door bell behind me and a lady's voice said so sweetly, "Sorry to keep you waiting' sonny Jim, I just popped over road to get some greens for tea, (to Welshs' corner greengrocers) what would you like?" Quite unable to answer her because of a mouth crammed full of illicit loot, I froze. Petrified, I kept my back to her, trying desperately to swallow down whole pieces of un-chewed sweets. My face felt red and hot and it seemed impossible to get the mouthful of sweets down my throat, yet, somehow, I did! It was through sheer panic that I managed to

swallow them all back; the fear of being found out and branded as a thief, with all that that meant if my parents were told. So, finally, after what seemed ages, I turned to her with a hot red face and watery eyes, caused by my embarrassment and from choking back lumpy sweets, I was able to turn to her and 'innocently' give her my order. I reckon that she must have known what I had been up to, but she never said a word and I was soon out of the shop and on my way home, greatly relieved to have got away with it. It was a long time before I went back into that shop again. However, I've never stolen a sweet since!

Another corner shop that I occasionally called in on my way home was on a corner in Tewson Road, opposite the entrance to St Nick's hospital. I used to get a glass of homemade lemonade from this tiny shop. The lady would ask what flavour I wanted and poured the coloured liquid into a glass tumbler. She'd put the tumbler on a stand with a metal tube going into the glass. The machine had a round glass container on top filled with water. A lever was pulled and there was whooshing and hissing sounds as lots of large bubbles globed up into the round glass container and, hey presto, I had a glass of extra gassy fizzy lemonade that tickled your nose as you drank it, all for a penny a large tumbler full!

A Mr Fletcher and his wife had a corner shop on the corner of Flaxton Road, top of Timbercroft Junior School. My eldest brother Mark sometimes helped him deliver the Star and Standard evening papers. Elderly Mr Fletcher collected his papers from Plumstead Station, delivering along Conway Road. Mark would meet him at the top of Lakedale Road. Mr Flaxton always had a pipe in his mouth and talked to everyone in his friendly high-pitched voice, through his teeth, without ever removing his pipe.

Alan Gibbs, remembering his local corner shops, says, "There was a group of corner shops in Conway Road and on the corner of Ancona Road was a group of little shops. Rumbold's was a hardware shop, selling everything from sweets to soap powder to paraffin. The sweets I remember were Flying saucers and Gob stoppers which you could suck all day. Long liquorice pipes plus sweet cigarettes; you could buy sherbet bags, wetting your finger and dipping it into the bag. On the other corner stood Loaders, which sold bread, ham, cheese and so on. Across the road stood Davies the butchers; in those days the floor was covered in sawdust. They used to have a chap deliver the meat on a delivery bike. Turkeys and poultry would hang up outside the shop at Christmas time; no frozen ones them days. Then there was the wireless shop where you would take your accumulator for the wireless to be recharged. There was also the Orchard Arms pub in Ancona Road where I was sent to get my dad's beer bottles filled up and a penny arrowroot biscuit for the dog. Just below the pub was Jones, one of the first shops to have a fridge, and where we all went to get our Jubley's. Back along Conway Road was Frank Bywaters the hairdressers, which also took orders for the chimney sweep, whose name was Waghorn, who had an old motorbike with a box sidecar, which carried his rods and brushes. The barbers wouldn't cut kids' hair on Saturdays as this day was reserved for adults only. One thing that puzzled me when he had cut the gents' hair he would often say, 'Anything for the weekend sir?' It wasn't until I got older that I realised what he was referring to!"

In Joyce Foster's story she remembers, "On just about every street corner there was a small shop. One day mum sent me across for two ounces of 'All Sorts'. On the way back temptation was just too great, so I ate one, but she knew that two 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, "I wasn't given the correct weight". The shopkeeper guest what had happened though and took pity on me and replaced it. On icy mornings an old man named Mr Baxter used to stand outside his shop on the corner of Avery St. and give us children a bulls-eye each".

An article from The Kentish Independent newspaper about the demise of the old Foxhill School and the former schoolboys;

'And with them has gone the little shop at the bottom of the hill (Foxhill) where they bought halfpenny bags of sweets.

Gordon Coton went to Foxhill Primary School and recalls: 'Us boys used to go to a sweet shop at the bottom of Foxhill and we could buy half-penny bags of sweets in which you might find a piece of cardboard, if you was lucky, as it entitled you to your money back. Another type of 'lucky dip' was a board that had lots of small holes drilled in it. You'd choose a hole and with a nail or matchstick push a piece of rolled up paper out of the hole and unroll it to see if you'd won a pennyworth, or more, of extra sweets. Gordon also recalls his local corner shop, which was situated on the corner of Foxhill and Elndean Roads. It sold just about everything you needed; a kind of general store that had a good mixture of goods. He recalls the big blocks of cheese and butter cut into the size you wanted with a wire cutter. Also the paper cone, deftly made by the shopkeeper by twisting a piece of paper round his fingers to hold the sweets. He remembers a small hand-held gadget for making ice-cream wafers. A wafer was put into its tray, then a lever pulled down, then a dollop of ice-cream was smoothed flat into it, another wafer put on top, the spring was released and up popped a uniform-sized wafer ice-cream'.

Bread was sometimes bought on Sundays from our corner shop if we'd ran out of it at home. We'd carry it home without any wrapping at all on it. Hygiene was not such a factor in those days. Behind the shop counter the sticky boiled sweets were handled with fingers that had just filled perhaps a container of paraffin; or had just cut up some rashers of bacon, wrapping it up in newspaper, and then picked up the broken pieces of toffee after perhaps handling some soap or counting a load of pennies into the till and then cutting up a block of cheese; doing this all day with the same busy fingers! Sticky buns and cakes sat exposed with no cover from dust and flies and were picked up with fingers; no tongs, and put into a paper bag that was often separated from the stack of bags by a swift lick of the fingers and the bag deftly blown open before the cakes were dropped in!



*Children outside a shop c.1900. (Photo © Children's Society)*

Local corner shops were more of a General store. Things could be purchased and paid for at the end of the week. Every item was carefully written into a well-thumbed book and the tally totalled up and then settled up by the customer each payday. This system afforded folk to continue to buy things during the week, when their money was short. This also helped the local corner shops to continue doing a reasonably steady daily business in the poorer working-class areas when the customer's money ran out.

# *The Other Barrow Boys*

*Colin Weightman*

The barrow, home made from a strong wooden crate mounted on the very best Pedigree perambulator wheels found at the Fanny-on-the-Hill council refuge tip, our kids extremely valuable commodity resource centre.

The barrow's usages were many and varied, often travelling many miles, negotiating all kinds of terrains, from the cobbled streets of the Woolwich market to the muddy bumpy paths and tracks of the woods and commons. We took turns to push the barrow on our longer journeys, missions that held the promise of adventure and possible monetary reward.

One day our mission was perhaps to collect old newspapers, a bulky but readily available commodity that was collected by travelling the local streets and knocking at people's doors



*Colin & his friend Ken outside their houses in Sladedale Road, c1954.*

and asking for "any old newspapers?" These would be piled up in the trusty barrow until we got a good load. We would then take them to the rag and paper collection yard that was off of a road near to Plumstead railway station. There they would weigh our load of papers on a set of old cast iron scales, carefully sliding the marker along the bar that indicated how heavy our bundle of papers was. I always watched this sliding indicator with much anticipation hoping that it would slide further along the bar to our monetary advantage and benefit. If we wanted we could take some of our bundles of newspaper to the fish and chip shop, usually the one in Lakedale Road, opposite the British Home Stores (or was it the Home and Colonial Stores?). We would trade the papers for a portion of freshly cooked steaming hot chips that we drowned in strong malt vinegar that stood on the high-up counter next to the big saltshaker.

Another time, if we saw it was the local coal delivery day, we might decide to follow the

horse and wagon around our local streets on its regular round of coal and coke deliveries. The wagon would be piled high with two tiers of black-tarred Hessian sacks all brimming full with lumps of shiny black coal. We would follow the wagon and wait as each load of coal was delivered to each house by the black faced coalmen who wore pointed blackened head-dresses made from a folded sack, to prevent the coal and dust falling down their necks. This was a good idea because the coalman would back on to the sack of coal that was perched up on the wagon, he'd pull the heavy sack onto his shoulders by gripping and tilting the full sack of coal. He would then carry it and shoot it down the small manholes that led to the cellars of the houses or they'd troop through the house to the coal box in the back yard, carefully negotiating the doors by bending down so as to miss the tops. When the coalman had neatly folded and stacked each empty sack on completion of his delivery and trundled on his way to the next delivery it was our turn. We would pick up the spoils from the curb and path. The odd lump of coal that had dropped from the over filled sacks when the coalman tilted the loaded sacks onto his shoulders. As each delivery ended we would add the lumps, big and small, all enthusiastically gleaned and loaded into the ever-filling barrow for our grateful mums and dads.

Then there was the bonfire night, Guy Fawkes and a penny for the guy season. Where we would trundle the old barrow up to the common and fill it up with golden autumn leaves, well trod down till we had a good load. Then, after we had exhausted ourselves playing and fighting each other in the piles of fallen leaves, we went home and stuffed them into our old clothes that we begged from our parents to make our guys. And then it was off to the busy bus stops to ask "penny for the guy mister?" on the cold dark winter evenings, standing round our masked guy that sat, string tied and silent, in the barrow.

Another time the barrow would be pushed over the common and down through Bowman's Woods and up through Bostall Woods where it would be loaded with the rich peat soil from Lessness Woods. This was probably illegal but then our gardens needed a good feed of this rich composted dark black soil. These woods were also a very good source of firewood and kindling from dead wind blown tree limbs. And again the good old barrow would be loaded with logs and branches to help fuel our living room fires.

My favourite trips with the barrow were to the two local rubbish tips, at Fanny on the Hill and the tip down under the railway bridges on White Hart Road. To scavenge unashamedly for hours on end, looking for goodies to load into the barrow.

It was at the White Hart Road tip that my mate Roger Herbert (later Harry Lane) and me were scavenging. It was wintertime and it was getting dark. The rubbish was burning and the flames lit the area up. One of the workers came over and offered us a sandwich each from his oxo lunch tin. I remember that it was a sardine sandwich; Harry cheekily said to the man that he didn't like them. It was at this tip that Harry found a few postage stamps in an album. This started him collecting stamps as a hobby. From this it grew into Harry specializing in stamps and in later life he became a specialist in postage marks and has since written and published several important books on this subject and they are sold and continue to be sold all over the world as he is recognized as the top most expert in this specialized subject. It just goes to show how things can develop from such humble beginnings.

Beresford Square market on Saturday evenings was what I most enjoyed. I would load the barrow up with the leftover fruit and veggies and fish that was dumped at the end of the very long market day. The barrow was always loaded, piled high with these goodies. All kinds of fruit and vegetables, plus sprats and other fish that I'd wrap up in newspaper. I would push the loaded barrow home, often in the dark, up the hills and in all weathers and I loved every bit of it, the trip, the expectation, the looking, the finding, and seeing the barrow fill up, all my own achievements. The old barrow was quite often bow wheeled from the sheer weight of the loads. My small legs and body would heave and push the heavy load all the way back home. I well remember how proud I would feel at bringing these goodies home to my parents each week.

The good uses I put that barrow to, collecting horse manure for the magnificent sum of 2/6d that I've mentioned in another story. (*See: The True Value Of Horses*) The barrow was often loaded with laughing giggling mates as we went off on yet another adventure, pushing each other along at breakneck speeds, swerving around trees and bumping down kerbs. And at the end of a long adventure filled day it carried our tired and weary wee bodies back home, taking it in turns to push each other as we sat crouched in the barrow.



**“Look—I’m  
12 stone 10!”**

**S**IMON really is getting a big boy —mother sees to that—and there’s no need for father to tip the scales in his favour.

As every mother knows, a lively, high-spirited family is not just an accident. They need care and thought, and above all, plenty of good nourishing food. That’s why mother makes sure they have wheatgerm bread every day. And since Hovis tastes so good, it makes her job a pleasure as well as a pride.

**A TASTY TOAST TIP:** Before you toast Hovis (which makes the nicest toast you ever tasted) cut off the crusts. It makes all the difference. Don’t know why. It just does.

# *The Plumstead Common Grand Prix*

*Albert Richard (Bert) Hooper*

British Columbia. Canada

You cannot imagine the excitement I felt one Christmas morning when Santa brought me a No. 6 Red Racer. It was so big it took up most of the available floor space in our front room in Sladedale Road. My eyes had been glued on a similar model in the window of the Sidney Ross toyshop on Powis Street, Woolwich, every time we'd gone by it on the bus. How Santa knew of my desire to be the owner of such a great peddle car was beyond my comprehension, so I just stood there, gob-struck!

Christmas is not a very good time to get such a toy, because it should preferably be used out of doors, and the cold wet weeks that followed that holiday season were very long indeed. I did creep into the front room occasionally and drive it backwards and forwards a few times, but my mother kept trying to get me out of that habit in case I did some major damage to the furniture and carpet. Any future sneaky test drives were totally forbidden one day after the flattened corpse of a mouse was discovered ground into the pile of the British India carpet.



## **Born to be wild!**

One Sunday afternoon my mother and father took me out for a very long ride in my No. 6 Red Racer. We started by slowly climbing the steep top half of Sladedale Road, but once we were on Lakedale Road and Plumstead Common Road the pace grew much faster. As we proceeded I made all kinds of loud motor noises. Once the weather got better I was taken onto the street and allowed to try things out on the path. I could not get up too much speed however because my father had taken

an old walking stick and attached a hook on the end that one of his colleagues had made in the Woolwich Arsenal. The hook fitted perfectly around the rear axle and restricted any fancy manoeuvres like two wheel driving along or off the edge of the curb. For some strange reason this walking stick device also made climbing hills a breeze; whenever I tried going up any type of incline without my father and the hook present, my legs tired very quickly! I made sounds with my mouth, and also started beeping and honking at every pedestrian that passed us by. A few motorists even returned the gesture, which really excited me and gave me the impression that I was now truly living in the 'fast lane'.

Somehow we made it all the way to the flat part of Plumstead Common bounded by Warwick Terrace, Waverley Crescent, and Old Mill Road. There were paved footpaths that criss-crossed this triangular piece of the Common, and my parents were able to sit on a park bench and watch me freely pedal around. After a while other children showed up with their pedal cars, which soon outnumbered the three wheel bicycles, toy prams and scooters. With

all the parents watching we soon started racing, but none of them were a match for my No. 6 Red Racer.



To this day I do not know how I had the energy to make it all the way back home to Sladedale Road, but I think that the magic walking stick and hook may have played a major part in the return journey.

I'm in my late 50s now, and I know many people my age that would baulk at the idea of walking that far today, let alone peddling it in a toy car! Back in those days there were very few cars on the streets around Plumstead Common, and everybody just walked everywhere they had to go, or took public transportation for longer journeys. The open space that the Common provides allows for all kinds of family activities such as these, and I

*Bert in his red racing car driving up Goldsmid Road.*

will forever be indebted to those who had the foresight to set aside these lands, plan their use, and to those who maintain them today.

We often returned to that part of Plumstead Common on fair weathered Sunday afternoons, and although this all took place when I was between four and six years old, I will never forget those 'Born To Be Wild' days of the Plumstead Common Grand Prix.



# *The Real Value Of Horses*

*Colin Weightman*

Mum had the bread and the milk delivered to the front door. The red \*CWS horse drawn vans delivered the goods.

Every day the baker would come to our door with his large wicker basket full of goodies. My mum would select perhaps the oblong, unwrapped, 'tin' loaf or the 'milk' loaf and dad's small brown loaf. Maybe, if us kids were lucky, some jam doughnuts for mid morning tea. I remember for a treat my mum would buy a 'Russian' cake, which was a marbled cake of different colours with walnuts in. He would write every purchase down in his delivery book in pencil, licking the pencil's lead tip occasionally, to make the pencil write clearer, then thrust the pencil behind his ear when he was finished.

The milkman would deliver his pints of milk, rattling the bottles on the red porch tiles and in his metal carry crate. If my mother wanted any cream on special weekends, or a different coloured milk top that denoted a different type of milk, she would pop a note for the milkman in the neck of an empty bottle. He also sold eggs and cheese and butter.

His faithful old workhorse would plod up hill and down, remembering to stop at every customer's house, especially so when there was a regular treat offered to it, such as a sugar lump, when it would walk onto the path to get to the gate for its expected treat.

The driver would put a metal skid which hung on a chain under the inside back wheel when coming down the steep hill.

I remember when I gave the milkman a hand once. I had to get up very early. It was still dark and also very cold. I climbed up aboard and felt quite pleased and somewhat important sitting up so high in the seat next to the driver and watched him flick the reigns occasionally and his foot worked the foot-brake pedal. He even let me hold the reigns and actually drive and taught me how to make that tch! tch! sound that coaxed the horse on its way along the dark empty early morning roads.

I was very enthusiastic, running here and there with the full and empty bottles. I soon learnt how to carry a load of empty bottles, with a finger inserted into the neck of each empty bottle; and soon had a full hand of empties proudly hanging off of each small hand.

I remember wanting to have a pee one morning, and the need getting more and more desperate! I just had to go, and when you've got to go you've got to go! Trouble for me was that there was nowhere to go, just a long row of terraced houses on both sides as far as the eye could see. This was going up the hill in Tormount Road. So I let the milk cart get ahead and nipped into someone's porch and, putting the milk quickly down I had a long, and very



*Colin aged 11, Sladedale Road.1955.*

relieving pee. It began to run out of the porch and down towards the footpath! Finished at last, I ran back to the float and carried on delivering. Well, this old man shouted angrily up the road to the milkman and complained very indignantly to him about how someone had just 'pissed in his porch'. Boy, was I embarrassed; I denied that I had done it, but it was pretty obvious that I had. The next day I didn't get to deliver the milk, or ever again with him.

I remember the horse-drawn Co-op coal delivery wagon, and the rag-and-bone man's smaller horse and cart. I can still hear his loud cry, 'Rag' 'n' 'Bone..e.e.e.s' as he plodded around the roads, sitting with his legs dangling over one side of the cart.

Then there were the local brewery's delivery horse drawn wagons from Beasley's. Their huge wooden drays loaded full of wooden beer barrels and stacked wooden beer crates, pulled by a team of big strong Clydesdale horses with the sound of their hooves clopping the road.

I had my homemade push barrow that I pushed everywhere. I'd used it to push the guy down to the bus stop at Guy Fawkes for "Penny for the guy please mister!" Sometimes, I'd push it on my rounds through the streets picking up the horse manure off the roads. An elderly old neighbour, Mr Smith, would give me 2/6d for a full barrow load of manure. He would pile and spread it around his rhubarb and tomato plants. "Makes 'em grow good and juicy!" he would tell us kids. A whole half a crown (25p)! That was a very goodly sum indeed of dosh to a couple of Common lads, which would buy a serious amount of sweets and goodies! Well worth the indignity of having to scrape up the horse manure, and so publicly, from around the streets. We would walk the busier streets pushing my barrow with keen eyes in search of this precious commodity.

When a fresh pile was spotted it was eagerly brushed on to the hearth-shovel with the hearth-brush and loaded into the barrow.

Fresh droppings would fill the barrow much quicker than the dry squashed run over piles; however, nothing was left, and every drop counted. Those were the days when the horse was truly valued by us wee entrepreneurial Common kids.

The following photo was very typical of what the coal delivery wagons looked like. This photo is of Brian Willoughby's grandfather, Jack Willoughby who was says Brian, 'a bit of a legend.' Jack here is seen delivering coal in Albatross Street, Plumstead, c1934.



# *The Slade Evangelical Church. 125th History*

*John Redman*

In the mid 1870s, when men and women were venturing out into Africa and Asia with the Gospel, in a small corner of South East England was Plumstead - then in the county of Kent. In an area called the Slade, situated on the edge of Plumstead Common, God was beginning to do a work.

In 1876, this area was the scene of a riot, led by John DeMorgan, after the Common owners, including the Queen's College Oxford, were selling off the land for building. The result of the riots led to the Metropolitan Board purchasing Plumstead Common and Bostall Woods, for the sum of £16,000.

In those days Plumstead High Street and King's Highway were very tranquil. The Boating Lake, now the paddling pool, was very popular for swimming and paddling, even having canoes and paddleboats, The Old Mill, stopped working, the sails were removed in 1830, and it became as we know it today.

Into this rural environment, Mr Robert Penn Campbell of the Christian Colportage Association came in 1876, selling Bibles, Christian literature and commencing open air and cottage meetings. His ministry was to continue in the area until he was called home in April 1922, at the age of 89.

Like-minded friends rallied to Mr Campbell's support and the Lord richly blessed their combined efforts. It was soon found necessary to find a meeting hall, and the Slade School, situated at the junction of The Slade and Lakedale Road, then called 'Cage Lane,' was rented. These buildings were associated with St Nicholas Church in Plumstead.



*The school hall, Lakedale Road 1877.*

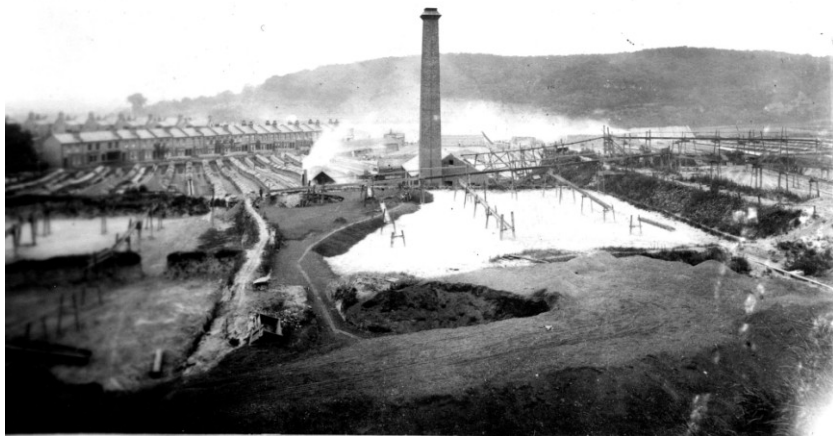


*The schools, junction of Lakedale, Winn's Common and King's Highway Roads, c.1877.*

As the blessing of God rested upon the ministry, they considered the prospect of a hall of their own. By 1880, with donations received, a freehold plot of land overlooking the Ravine was purchased for the price of £80.

During 1880, work commenced on the building, given the name, "The Slade Mission Hall," seating 150 people. The hall was dedicated in March 1881, during a violent snowstorm.

Bricks were obtained from Grubbs Brickyard, situated at the bottom of King's Highway, Rockcliffe Gardens and The Fanny on the Hill public house. All that reminds us of the brickfields today are brickfield cottages, which stand at the lower part of King's Highway.



*Brick works on King's Highway, 1901.*

*Photo: Greenwich Heritage Centre.*



*Brickfield Cottages, situated on lower King's Highway. Photo: Greenwich Heritage Centre.*

People who attended the Mission Hall worked on local farms, or in Woolwich Arsenal, many living in the new houses being built, such as those along Sutcliffe Road, and the top of Lakedale Road.

Around the Mission Hall was Sheldon's Farm in the Swingate Lane area and Jolly's Meadow, now Timbercroft Lane. The Woolwich Arsenal Football Club had its grounds in Flaxton Road, before moving to Highbury in 1904.

While the work of The Slade Mission was beginning, other gospel works were being established as the area grew; along Plumstead Common Road, the Methodist Church built in 1862 and demolished in 1949, Griffin Road, where a Baptist Church had commenced in the mid 1880's, and a Mission Hall was started on the corner of Cage Lane, now Lakedale Road and Brewery Road Known as Cage Lane Mission, Cage Lane so called, due to having a cage placed at the lower end where the fire station is today. The cage-like building was a temporary home to sober up those who were drunk and disorderly. Stocks stood on the other side of the road.



*The Cage in 1820.*



*Cage Lane Mission, 1905, two views, (note Brewery gates in lower photo) corner of Lakedale and Brewery Roads. Photos: Greenwich Heritage Centre.*



The Slade Mission's first annual report was produced early in 1882, giving an account of the work plus the income and expenditure, showing how the work was progressing. During the early days of the Mission, Mr Penn Campbell was greatly assisted by a number of officers from the Royal Artillery Barracks.

Records show that by the 10th October 1888, there were 240 names on the Sunday School roll, with an average attendance of 200 children. A meeting in January 1889 decided that it would be desirable for extra accommodation to be provided; however, it wasn't until 1893-1895 that it was possible to erect buildings.



*The scullery c.1884.*

It's interesting to see the external part of the scullery.... and the inside...(we grumble about our kitchens today!) There was a Bible Class room that doubled up as a vestry...a primary department, and a Sunday School hall.... And one outside toilet!

In 1900, The Rev David Carnegie accepted the responsibility of the pastoral oversight of the Mission, making it a condition of his

acceptance, that he should be given a free hand in conducting the ministry of the Mission. This included the breaking of bread, or Communion services, as we call them today. His ministry commenced on the 16th June 1900 and he was ably assisted by his eight sons and two daughters through the years.

In 1902, it became necessary to enlarge the original hall by adding a new frontage and gallery. This occupied the full width of the site and cost approximately £1,400. Members were invited to donate a halfpenny a brick and 2/6d per chair. This resulted in such enthusiasm that a new name was adopted - 'The People's Hall'.

When Mr David Carnegie passed away in February 1908, his son Mr George Carnegie as superintendent succeeded him. Again their great problem was a lack of Sunday School accommodation. It seems incredible, but there were 728 children on the roll, with an average attendance of 505.

Mr Penn Campbell suggested that we rent a house on the corner of Frances Street, now Kirkham Street, formerly used as a Working Men's Club. This was agreed and the rooms were soon turned into classrooms for the young people.

The property was eventually purchased by Miss Barbara Carnegie in 1919, and subsequently given to the church in 1922, and named The Mission House. It was eventually sold in 1984 and is now a Doctor's surgery.

The men's Bible Class in 1913, meeting on Sunday afternoons in the Mission House, had an average attendance of 28. Christian Endeavour met midweek, with 81 attending and 140 at the Band of Hope meetings. There was also a ladies Thursday afternoon meeting that commenced in 1905 and by 1913 had an attendance of 70.

With the 1914-18 war concluded, Mr George Carnegie retired in 1920.

By 1921, with the spiritual development and numerical growth, it was agreed that a recognised church should be established with a paid minister. In February 1921, the Rev R A Mathers, a missionary with the Regions Beyond Mission Society, was invited to become the first pastor during the short period of his furlough, being seven months. During this time Mr Mathers gathered around him a Church Council, comprised of leaders from the various

departments. He instituted church rules and covenants, and a church members' roll. He returned to the Congo and succumbed to a fever. The Lord took him to glory in March 1923.



*Peoples Hall 1902.*

In March 1922, the church called the Rev Percy Faunch, who came from Guildford. He exercised a deep spiritual ministry until 1926. A manse in Dallin Road was purchased, and during that time the church became a founding member of The Fellowship of Interdenominational and Unattached Churches, now the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, or FIEC. This was established as a link for independent churches and chapels that were not associated with any denominational connections, to have fellowship together.

The first register shows the list of churches and pastors who were linked with the Fellowship. Pastor Faunch acted as its first Secretary.

Rev E J Willis became the pastor from March 1927 to 1929, continuing to strengthen the foundation with his strong, Biblical ministry.

Pastor Willis met with the Church Council in 1928. Mr Stocks was about to retire as Secretary and Treasurer of the church at about this time, a position he had held since its foundation.

Mr Walker Heddle was appointed Church Secretary, a position he to hold for some 33 years. We remain thankful to the Lord for his administrative skills and Godly manner. In 1929 as he took up his position, we were at last able to purchase No 38 The Slade, next to the church, which was to become an essential part of the future redevelopment of the church.

In 1929, the special Jubilee edition of our monthly newsletter, the "Slade Sower," featured an

article by pastor Willis, in which he recorded the first notes of the church's history.

In March of 1930, a service of Dedication was held for the Sunday School cot. The Sunday School children had contributed to the cost of this and it was placed in the new Memorial Hospital, built from donations from the people of Plumstead and Woolwich, following the Great War.

With the coming of the Rev W H P Goodchild in April 1932, we began to see possibly some of the biggest changes ever seen in the history of the church. A new manse was purchased at 234 Plumstead Common Road. Mr Goodchild inspired the church to commence the building scheme proposed by his predecessors. This was now helped due to the purchase of No 38, which gave us extra garden space.

In July 1933, permission was given to demolish the rear buildings, those that were erected in 1895. This was part of phase 1, that would replace the vestry, kitchen and toilets, make improvements to the original Mission Hall and install electric lighting. The cost of all this was £1,417. The work was completed by March 8th 1934, when a Dedication service was held.

While excavating the old site, the original foundation stone was found and is now mounted above the vestry door.

Phase two was to have a youth hall built in the grounds of No 38, but had to wait until funds were available.

October saw the commencement of the Brigades. The Boy's Brigade was formed on the 5th October 1934, with Will Wright as Captain. Sadly, no photos exist of those early days as they were destroyed in a bombing raid. On 29th October, the Girl's Life Brigade commenced with Mabel Newson captain and lieutenants Muriel Norman, and Ruby Wright, The Brigades were to be active very in church life for the next 52 years.

During the 1930's, many members moved to the Welling-Bexleyheath area, where thousands of new homes were being built. The area provided very little opportunity for people to attend a church, or their children a Sunday School. Consideration was being given to erecting a temporary building in Welling when an old Primitive Methodist Church came up for sale, with a purchase price of £1,250. Mr Goodchild and Mr Heddle approached a number of local Christian businessmen who were able to finance the project, and the Welling Evangelical Church was dedicated on the 22nd November 1934.

On the 11th April 1935, Mr Robert Rawlinson, who for many years had been Chairman of the Council, Sunday School Superintendent and Choir Master, spoke at the newly formed Sisterhood meeting. In the course of his message, he related that at his mother's funeral service, a posy was dropped into the grave with a card attached which said, "Faithful unto death" Mr Rawlinson remarked "I wish for nothing better when it is my time to go." On April 12th, within approximately 12 hours, he was in glory, having fallen from a gantry of his crane in the Arsenal. You can imagine what a great shock it was to the members, who decided that on the completion of phase 2 - the Sunday School building would be named the Rawlinson Memorial Hall. The building was completed and dedicated on May 17th 1937, a cost of £2,039 and has been greatly used in the spread of the Gospel down the years.

After a busy and fruitful six years, Mr Goodchild concluded his ministry on 28th November 1938, when he was called to Brighton.

Rev D M Russell-Jones came to us in September 1939, just at the outbreak of war. Before the bombing really intensified in London, the church was able to celebrate its Diamond Jubilee services in 1940.

Harvest was celebrated in 1941, while the war continued. Shortly after this, the pastor explained to the church that he believed it was Biblical for us to use the term 'Deacons' rather than Council.

Although the east end of London and the Docks were badly affected by the bombing, we also were badly bombed, being very close to the Royal Arsenal the Military Barracks, and numerous anti-aircraft gun sites, on Bostall Heath and Shooters Hill. Mr Russell-Jones had opportunities to share the gospel down in shelters and, with his wonderful singing voice, brought not only comfort, but also a challenge to many.

The majority of members and their homes were miraculously preserved. The only damage that the church sustained was to number 38, when an unexploded shell, one of our own, demolished the front bay. This proved to be a blessing in disguise, as we were able to claim war damage and the compensation greatly helped in the 1954 rebuild.

So many of our men were away serving in the forces, but James Stringer, a former member of the Boys' Brigade, was killed in Italy in 1943.

Pastor Russell-Jones concluded his ministry at The Slade in 1946.

In 1947, the Rev Stanley Collins came to us from Winchester. Having a strong desire and vision for evangelism. The Lord richly blessed his ministry, and following the traumas of war, the people of the district were ready to receive the Gospel. We began to evangelise around the district and on Winn's Common, where over 100 prefabs had been erected.

The Boys Brigade and Girls Life Brigade reached high numbers again and went off to enjoy camps and other activities.

At nearby Eltham, the Coldharbour Estate was being built, and work was started with believers meeting in a hut. Jim Bush, one of our men, went there as pastor. This building was erected in 1948, replacing the hut.

Even then sport played a big part in our evangelism, The Slade had formed a sports club with football, cricket and tennis. Each Boxing day, the Boys Brigade would challenge the members of the sports club to a football match. In the summer we challenged others churches to cricket.

In 1950, we commenced the Children's Gospel Service. This was a Sunday night meeting for children who came with their parents.

Numbers greatly increased and if you weren't at the church by 6 pm on a Sunday night, you were unable to get a seat, and so plans were drawn up to add an extension, by demolishing No 38, The Slade.

By 1950, most things were off ration and harvest was joyfully celebrated.

Just before the outbreak of war, the Glenmore Estate was constructed and during the early part of the 1950's it was decided that we should commence a work on that estate. Initial meetings were held at Wickham Street School.

The Slade ran a tent campaign on a piece of ground that was purchased by Ron Hammett from Bexley Council for £350. The intention was to erect a building, but there was a proviso that the building must be erected within 14 years.

Unfortunately as local FIEC churches were not in a position to give any financial support, and the FIEC felt the site was too close to The People's Hall and Welling Evangelical Church, the land had to be returned to Bexley Council.

The 70th Anniversary services were held in 1950. By 1953, amendments had been made to the original sketches for the re-development of the work, which was then approved and set in motion. Work commenced in September 1953.

The work progressed steadily. The old Mission Hall was demolished, leaving just the 1902 frontage remaining.

The extension was completed as we know it today, except in 1955, buses on the 54 and 126 routes, terminated outside the church, and you will notice the old cottages that used to be on the right hand side.

The total cost of the building, which included gas fired central heating, pews and pulpit that came from the old Plumstead Common Methodist Church, was £12,500.

In the goodness of the Lord, the church was clear of debt by 1957.

The services of dedication were held on April 3rd and 4th, led by the Rev Grady Wilson, an associate evangelist of the Billy Graham team.

In May 1955, after eight fruitful years of much blessing, pastor Collins left to take over the responsibility of Carrubers Close Mission in Edinburgh.

In October 1955 the 21st reunion Celebration services of the Boys Brigade and the Girls Life Brigade were held, when a large number of the existing and former members were present.

The Rev Gwyn Rowlands came to us from Holywell, North Wales, commencing his ministry on the 17th October 1957. Although his time with us was brief, he resigned in July 1958; it was during his ministry that we saw the commencement of a Saturday morning prayer meeting, which was a means of blessing until the Young People's Fellowship became adventuresome in 1958, purchasing an old bus, number EEL 45, that travelled many miles, taking the Young People's singing group and the Plumstead Male Voice Choir to meetings. It was also used in Woolwich market for open-air meetings on Sunday nights.

On April 2nd 1960, pastor Timothy Alford begin his ministry, coming from Salford Evangelical Church in the West Country, where he had been part-time pastor for two years. He introduced several helpful ministries, including a 'Pastoral Hour,' during which people could go to him with spiritual problems, and for baptism and membership classes. The old 'Slade Sower' disappeared and the weekly newsheet entitled 'Contact' was introduced.

We were thankful for the Lord's hand of safety when in June 1963, 18 of our 70 Sunday school children on an outing to Seaford, were cut off by the sea. Their dramatic rescue by

helicopter was reported in the national newspapers, but causing great disappointment to the remaining 52, who could only watch from the cliffs.

Together with the Deacons, pastor Alford was keen to move the church forward with the appointment of Elders. Although the provision was included in our constitution at that time, it did not come to fruition until 1988.

The 1960's saw massive development on the Thamesmead Estate along the River Thames, Mr Alford and other evangelical ministers were instigators of a large meeting of protest against the proposal of the Greater London Council to provide only an ecumenical church, to the exclusion of all others on the estate.

Approximately 1,000 people attended this meeting at the Slade when every available space was taken. Dr Martin Lloyd-Jones was the main speaker. The result of subsequent negotiations was that a more amicable attitude was adopted by the GLC and sites were granted for the Strict Baptist's and the FIEC. Sadly the FIEC was not in a position to take up a plot.

Mr Alford's ministry concluded in April 1967 characterized by his strict spiritual emphasis, when he moved to Felixstowe.

Rev Alan Toms moved from Philip Street in Bristol, to commence his ministry at the Slade in September 1968. Not only did he continue to build upon Mr Alford's Bible teaching ministry, he also greatly enlarged the church's missionary vision and our links with FIEC when he became its president in 1971.

In 1968, the church decided to replace the old pews and install more modern seating. Two years later, we decided to change the platform layout, bidding farewell to the choir stalls.

At the same time, an opportunity arose for us to purchase a more modern Manse. The one in Plumstead Common Road was costly on repairs and had no central heating, so a property in Bostall Hill was purchased from one of our members.

On the evangelistic front, there was concern for the children in the long summer holidays, so in 1973; a holiday Bible Club commenced, which has been blessed by the Lord down through the years.

In 1975, Mr John Strutt retired after 13 years as church secretary and the time was right to make changes to how the diaconate were elected. Here we see the new diaconate with the pastor.

Pastor Toms concluded his ministry in August 1977, when he became Co-Director of the Messianic Testimony.

Rev Beverly Savage joined us as pastor in August 1978, having spent some years in Willesden North London. He came to us with enthusiasm, drive and vision, which over the following twelve years of his ministry, saw many changes as we sought to adjust to the new social climate, while still holding firmly to biblical truths.

House groups and Church Officer's weekends commenced. During this time Mr Savage was also involved in the commencement of a church in Brixworth, Northampton, when four of our members moved into that area.

As the church had sold the Manse in Bostall Hill to the Messianic Testimony for the Toms family, it was decided a property nearer the church would be advantageous. 13 Chelsworth Drive was purchased, where it was hoped we could build an extension on the side. Unfortunately, due to many planning difficulties, we had to look for another property.

In the goodness of the Lord we were able to find a four bedroomed house with a garage, in Doran Grove. The garage was eventually transformed into the pastor's study.

In 1980 the church with members past and present and other friends gathered for the Centenary thanksgiving service. We squeezed into the pulpit, four former pastors who were to take part over the weekend.

It was also a time to reflect on those the Lord had called out into missionary work and a number of them were able to join with us over that Centenary weekend. We held a Missionary exhibition where the Rawlinson Hall was turned into a desert, complete with a Bedouin tent and sand. Our world map was placed on the wall above and behind the pulpit.

For the Centenary project, we improved the foyer of the church. At last we were able to open up a doorway enabling us to go into the gallery without leaving the building.

In the goodness of the Lord, to ease some of the pastoral pressures, Andy Paterson joined us from south west London, as assistant pastor.

For many, 1986 was a sad year as we saw the Brigades closed, not through the lack of youngsters, but because of the difficulty we were having in finding officers to sustain the work. No doubt some of the neighbours had a more peaceful Sunday morning without the band and the Brigades marching the streets once a month.

The following year Andy and Kath Paterson left us when Andy accepted the pastorate at Kensington Baptist Church in Bristol.

Having agreed to appoint elders back in the 1880's, it was not until 1988 that our first church elders, Jeff Laws and Oliver Gay, were elected.

In 1990, pastor Savage concluded his ministry to join the FIEC, about that time we had a visit from Josef Tson, a Romanian pastor who had been in jail for a number of years. In his message he referred to the importance of encouraging and supporting churches in Romania. He later linked us to Golgotha Baptist Church in Arad.

Between 1991 and 1994, we made 22 trips to Romania, seeking to encourage our brothers and sisters, as they regained possession of their church that had been taken over by the Communists, to be used as a bakery. Golgotha Baptist church held a special dedication service in 1994.

In 1992 the Rev Hill joined us as pastor, from Worthing. Having been a hard businessman, converted in mid-life, he came with a very strong evangelistic vision. In the goodness of the Lord, we saw a large number of people come to know the Lord during the early period of his ministry.

In 1993, the BBC visited us to record a Sunday Half Hour, Radio 2 Broadcast. The following year we had great fellowship with a small choral group from Arad Romania spending two weeks with us.

Structural changes were afoot in 1995-97, when it was decided to build a lounge on the side of the church. This necessitated pulling down the small hall and clearing the site. Much of the extension was built by our own men, who spent many hours on the project. We even moved the frontage of the Rawlinson Hall.

While all the rebuilding was going on in 1986, the church called Andy Porter to be assistant pastor.

While the lounge was being erected, it was decided that we would change the platform, which also meant that we needed to insert a new baptistery.



*The last Boys Brigade Parade, 1985*

In 1998 after 96 years as being known as the People's Hall Evangelical Free Church, but still affectionately called The Slade, the members agreed that the time was right to identify ourselves closer to the locality where the Lord had placed us, so the church was renamed The Slade Evangelical Church.

Having set up a strong Millennium evangelistic programme for us, Mr Hill was then called to the pastorate of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Chapel in Lincoln, in 2000.

Rev Wes McNabb came to the pastorate in 2002. Coming with his young family to the openness of the Common, from the Dales around Walton in Derbyshire.

In 2005 Chris Statter returned from more than four years of missionary service in Spain and the Church appointed him as associate pastor.

In November 2005, the church, with former members and friends, came together to praise the Lord for 125 years of His faithful hand upon the work. The young people gave us a demonstration of how the children would have dressed through the ages of our church

history. Pastors, past and present, were able to join with us for that occasion.

So what about the future? Well, thankfully we are as much in the Lord's hands now as we have been from the day when He stirred up Robert Penn-Campbell, more than 125 years ago.

Our prayer is that the Bible, the Word of God, will remain at the centre of our ministry, that the Lord will honour the preaching of His Word, and by the outpouring of His Spirit, that in the days to come, we will see many more men and women, boys and girls turning to Christ for salvation. So please, continue to remember us in your prayers.

*See also John's story: King's Highway In The Early 1940's and 50's.*

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# *The Slade Ponds*

*Julia Cowdell*

The Slade Ponds were traditionally a much-loved feature of Plumstead Common, which, over the years, became polluted. Elderly residents remember that in their youth the water was clean enough for people to swim there. The actual function of the ponds nowadays is to act as a balancing lake for local surface storm water. The Plumstead Common Environment Group members' felt that this was no reason for the ponds to remain polluted and that they offered great potential for wildlife.



*Plumstead Common The Ravine Ponds c1906.*

The Group seriously considered the possibility of restoring the ponds in 1991 when two enterprising teenage girls, Kalin Watts and Vicky Bradshaw from Plumstead Manor School, wrote to Greenwich Council asking if anything could be done to clean them up. Apart from a constant problem of littering and dumped rubbish, both in and around the ponds, the water was stagnant and foul smelling. The girls were particularly concerned for a pair of mallard ducks, which had managed to breed there, but the ducklings had not survived. They wondered whether a floating island in addition to the existing island at the centre of a dilapidated weir could be installed, which would provide a haven from predators and encourage ducks and other water birds to establish themselves. The Council put the girls in touch with Plumstead Common Environment Group, which had come into existence in May of that year. When, a few months later, a local landscape architect, Rob Poole, joined the group they were in the fortunate position of being able to undertake an ambitious project to restore the ponds to a condition of health.

Work began with a series of Group clean-ups culminating in May/June 1992 when we removed the algae that completely covered the pond that spring. It became clear that sewage was present, and this was confirmed by water analysis. The Council were notified and they accordingly applied to Thames Water, who owns the site, for a grant in order to investigate the source and take appropriate action. This was done, and the Council also removed contaminated silt from the top pond. Oil coming into the ponds was an on-going problem,

which had to be dealt with throughout the project.

The Group meanwhile applied to the Shell Better Britain Campaign for a grant to enable them to embark on the programme that Rob Poole had drawn up. He envisaged four phases for the project:

To build two gabion retention weirs.

To fill and plant a reed bed.

To improve planting on the island and repair the existing weir.

To construct a floating duck island.

The reed bed would absorb/filter many of the pollutants present in the water entering the upper pond. The weirs would create a holding pond, the water from which would be oxygenated as it flowed into the upper pond and on into the lower pond.

In addition to the grant from Shell which, together with donations, the Group spent on the wire gabions and plastic membrane for the weirs, they received materials such as road stone (for filling the gabions), paving slabs (for covering them), sand (to mix with cement for concreting) and clay (for lining the holding pond) from Council contractors, as well as plastic piping from a local business. They also received additional funding from Thames Water.

They organised two Group working weekends in November and December of 1992, recommencing in January 1993, after which they established a routine of working one weekend in three. Thirty-six members worked on the project throughout the year, of whom around twenty formed the hard core. Twenty-eight children were involved from time to time. The Group also received additional help from eleven prison volunteers, four students on placement from Greenwich University and twenty-six guest volunteers, with generally around twenty people working on the site over the course of a weekend. The project brought together many people of all ages from different parts of the community. Those who could not help physically with the work offered assistance in a variety of ways, for example, by generous donations towards the pond fund, by offering use of toilet facilities and boiling water for Thermoses. An active partnership with Greenwich Council was forged, in particular with the Engineering Department, Leisure Services (Parks) and Street Cleansing. The support and encouragement of Councillor Bob Harris, then Chair of Leisure Services, was also much appreciated.

For the second phase the Group were awarded a grant from English Nature to purchase 100 cubic metres (approximately 160 tons) of river washed gravel for the reed bed. A Group member, Julia Dawkins, who was one of the leaders of the project, subsequently obtained reeds free of charge from a source in Thamesmead.

In June 1994 the Group was awarded a Best of Better Britain Award by Shell. In 1995 the planting of willows on the island took place together with some minor repairs to the old weir. In the summer of 1996 the Council dredged the lower pond, removed the contaminated silt, and replaced the old sluice gate. This further improved water quality. More reeds were ordered, this time from the Environment Agency. Gradually marginal planting was undertaken and in June 1997 the Group installed a floating duck platform made from reconstituted plastic. Vegetation was gradually introduced to the platform and in the

spring/summer of 2000, to the Group's delight, the resident pair of ducks raised six ducklings and the visiting moor hens produced three clutches of chicks.

The Group's intention in introducing a natural cleansing process to the Slade Ponds was to allow them to recover and bring them into ecological balance, with additional benefits in creating habitat for wildlife. The Ponds, no longer the foul smelling and murky waters which existed before the project commenced, have become a real oasis of natural beauty and local people have shown considerable interest in the site and the wildlife which is present there. In addition to the water birds this includes frogs, toads and newts, dragonflies, mayflies and damselflies as well as many species of birds.

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

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# *The Swings At The Slade*

*Albert Richard Hooper*

I fondly remember The Monkey Trees over by the old wall of St Nick's Hospital, just at the top of Tuam Road, above the stone scree slope off Lakedale Road, and I often think about all the children that got their daily exercise swinging from the limbs of those trees by their legs, hands, and arms.

I often laugh when remembering, the all too often times, when I was almost swinging by a few fingernails in an attempt to stop myself from falling.

The limbs of those trees were polished to perfection by the constant rubbing of our sponge-soled shoes, runners and sandals.

We'd love the stroll to the Sunday cricket matches that were played in such a civilized manner on the cricket pitch next to Old Mill Road. These events were very well attended, and were the perfect outing for families to sit in the sun, or the shade of a tree, and enjoy a picnic.

There was also the added attraction of a pint or two from either of the two pubs, plus refreshments from the clubhouse, or a few local corner shops that opened on Sundays.



I remember so well the old bell ringers at old St Mark's and St Margaret's Churches as they carried out their vocation so loudly on Sunday mornings as they took turns pulling on the ropes in the belfries.

One Sunday at St Mark's, I remember asking Tommy Edwards, a cousin of my mother, if I could have a go at pulling the rope.

"We'd be worried that you'd shoot up the tower son, never to be seen again, because you need to be a little bit heavier," he replied, with chuckles from the other bell ringers.

I must admit that it did instil in me a small amount of fear towards those ropes, as a huge length of rope shot through the trap door and disappeared from view up the tower, with just the tail end and knot of the rope below the brightly coloured, and thicker, braided handle remaining in view.

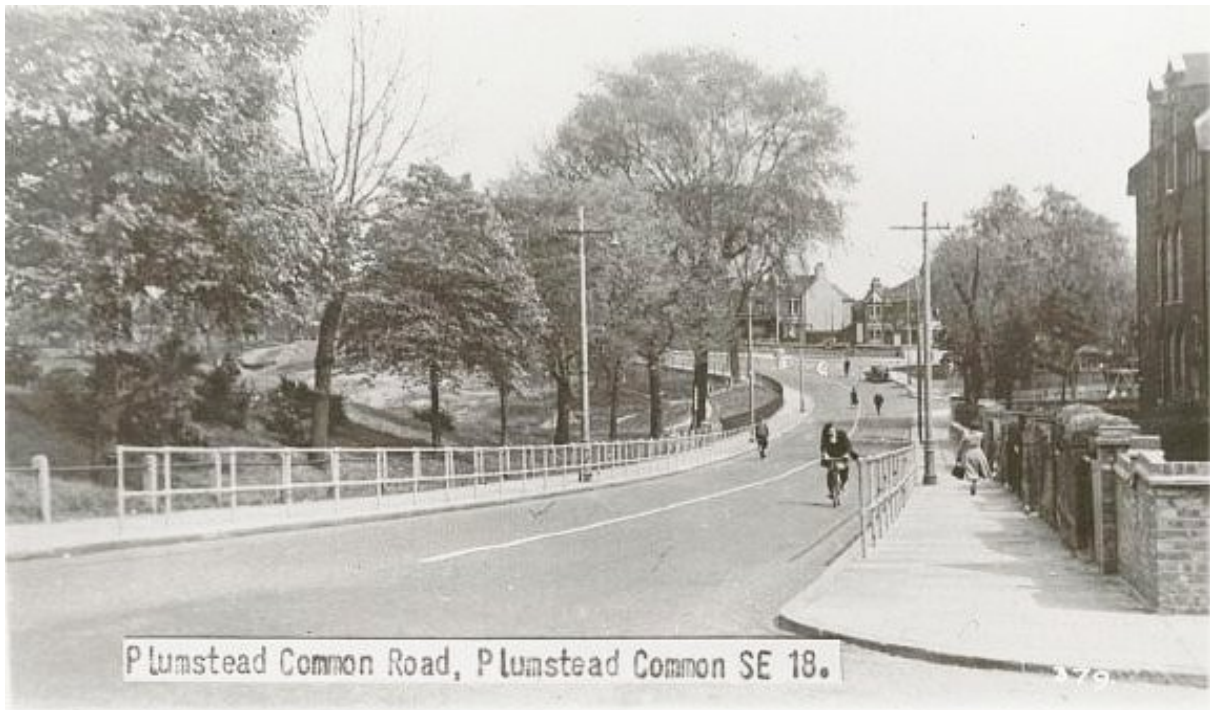
Another activity for Tommy Edwards while at St Mark's was the carrying of the incense, which he swung with great precision during the ceremonial procession in many of the services.

Being a choirboy at the time, I was no stranger to getting a cloud of this strange smelling concoction right up my beak!

“What’s in that incense?” I asked one Sunday morning, after almost loosing my earlier consumed Shredded Wheat, right after smelling the smoke that was produced from inside his swinging ball on a chain.

“Worms, son!” he exclaimed, with more chuckles from his colleagues.

With all those potential stories put to rest, at least for now, I’m pleased to inform you all that this story is about The Slade Swings. Just a small patch of managed playground, right next to the old Slade School, across from the public toilets and the Common, and surrounded by railings to allow constant view, in and out.



*The Slade School, right. Beyond it is the Slade Playground, below the trees. (Late 1940’s early 50’s.)*

Children would be dropped off here, while their mothers did some shopping at the Slade, attended the clinic that was just around the corner at the bottom of Garland Road, or the small library which was behind the clinic on Erindale.

The Swings was the perfect place for young mothers to meet and chat about life, all the while keeping an eye on their little darlings. Also, with Timbercroft Lane Primary and Infant Schools being just a short walk up the road, they could stay there until it was time to go and meet their older children.

On weekends many fathers took their children to The Swings, which gave them the opportunity to nip across the road and grab a few quick pints at “The Who’d A Thought It” pub.

Now I know that this does indeed sound a little like child neglect, but it was a win-win situation for many of the children, and also for any of those that lived close by and had just

walked from home.

After a few drinks many of the fathers wandered back across the road with a few bags of Smith's Crisps, or peanuts, which we all shared.

If a few fathers were feeling really good, money for an ice cream or two might be on offer, and quite often for your new found friends as well.

The Slade Swings very soon became our place of gathering, and with time our parents allowed us to go there on our own, all the way from Sladedale Road too!

As I attended Timbercroft Lane School, many of the children there were also known to me from school, which made for quite a crowd of children, and as we were all born not long after the war, believe me there were indeed many of us.

It was here where I started to learn some of the tricks that young boys pass along to their friends, when they get bored with the various rides available in the playground.

One mate showed me how to get a few pennies from some of the young mothers who were shopping. All you did was approach a woman pushing a small pram or strollers, and hopping from one leg to another, beg her for a penny to use in the public toilets.

I'd then go in one door, making out to the attendant that I was looking for my friend, then exit the other door, and run across the road to the Swings.

My first day of this produced about sixpence, which was soon spent on a few ice creams, or nice fresh cream buns from the bakery.

We all thought that we'd hit the big mother lode with this trick, and I must admit that it went on for many days before disaster struck!

"You bleedin' got me wiv that one the other bloody day, you little sod!" exclaimed this woman outside the greengrocer's shop, at the exact same time as my aunt Vera walked along.

"He'll not be doing it any more!" she proclaimed loudly! as she handed the woman a thru'penny bit, which shut her up instantly.

She never told my parents, but I had to swear never to do anything like it again, and I must say that I never did. But it was indeed such a great plan!

From the Swings we could see all the traffic going by, and on one occasion we all heard this loud bang, which turned out to be the scene of an accident at Plumstead Common Road and Warwick Terrace.

A motorcyclist had driven right into the rear end of a bus, and all of his fingers were very badly injured where the brake callipers had been forced back onto his fingers at the moment of impact.

On another day, during the beginnings of a thunderstorm, a man who was painting the railings around the Common apparently died as a result of the lightning.

There were many other car accidents, as people raced along Plumstead Common Road, or turned too soon into Kirkham Street.



All this action and all the rides at the Swings made this the centre of our growing world for many years.

*Liz Doherty at the Slade Swings in 1962.*

The merry-go-round was fun too, especially if you got enough children on it, all running to increase the speed. God help you though if you leaned out too far and connected your

head with the head of another walking by... Talk about seeing stars!

A boy was brought into the playground at the Swings one day, suffering from facial injuries he'd received when he had fallen forwards face first onto the square railings, around the Common, half way up the gentle hill towards the Woodman Pub. He'd been doing a tightrope-balancing act walking along the railings, and had fallen forwards with one leg either side of the railing.

His top and bottom lip were split wide open, and he was complaining of excruciating pain in his groin area.

My father was in the pub at the time, and on hearing that a young boy had been injured; he came running across the road, almost being hit by a bus at the same time.

Following that incident my father often had us go to the pub with him, and sit on the bench outside, but he did come with us to the Swings on the way home.

The big attraction at the Swings for me was the swings themselves, and as I'd long grown out of the infant ones with bars to keep me in, the open ones were now my ride of choice.

I soon mastered the art of leaning back, with my legs outstretched, and then quickly sitting up with my legs curled under the seat, which started the swinging motion.

Before long I was amongst the select few that the Park Warden insisted should not go quite so high, as at the very top of my swing the chains were going too slack. This badge of honour I wore proudly until the day when my seat turned over a little and I came crashing down to the ground.

I spent hours and hours some days just swinging as high as I possibly could, which allowed me to really see the faces of the people on the upper decks of the buses, and I felt that we were actually meeting face-to-face, eye to eye.

Whoever planned the location of the Swings really understood the value of such a playground in the lives of children, and I will forever be indebted to that foresight.

A few children broke an arm or a finger being silly, or playing in such a fashion as to

potentially cause harm to another.

Children always have and always will take chances by living dangerously, just as we did in an attempt to squeeze every ounce of excitement out of every day.

The great story here is that I would hazard a guess that hundreds of thousands, or even millions of children, have enjoyed the Slade Swings through the years, and hopefully will continue to do so for generations to come.

The memory of them is as clear in my mind as many of my fondest memories gathered like sweet strawberries in my journeys to various corners of the world.

Just last summer my wife and I were on a day trip from Powell River to Texada Island, off the coast of British Columbia, between the Mainland and Vancouver Island.

We found a wonderful park at a small community called Shelter Bay, with sweeping ocean view beaches, a single beachfront restaurant, and no crowds at all.

Right there on the wind-swept shores of the Georgia Striates was also a huge set of swings, which my wife and I soon sat on and journeyed back to our childhood memories.

A very young girl sat next to me, and on accepting the fact that my grey hair and size reminded her of her grandfather, she soon felt comfortable enough to strike up a conversation.

"You sure can swing good!" she said with such a positive tone in her voice.

"Thank you very much." I replied.

"I wish I could swing like that," she said sadly, "But if you give me a push, to get me started I'll be fine", she added coyly.

"I'll teach you something that will last forever." I replied, as I showed her how to push her legs out as far as she could, all the while leaning back, and then quickly sitting up, with her legs curled under the seat.

In no time at all she was swinging away like an old expert.

When we were later talking to her parents at the restaurant, she came up to me asked me where I'd learned to swing so good.

I told her about the Slade Swings on Plumstead Common in England, and how I'd spent so many of my childhood days there learning to swing and all the various other rides.

"That sounds way more fun than Vancouver's Playland or even Disneyland" she said boldly.

"And guess what," I said with mystery in my voice.

"What?" she asked full of excitement.

"It was all free!" I replied softly.

"Wow, you were lucky" she replied in amazement.

Out of the mouth of babes comes the most significant of truths.

Just ask any of those lucky ones that knew the Slade Swings on Plumstead Common.

# The Tarrants Of North Woolwich

*Mahala Mehmet*

Working as a community carer in the Borough of Greenwich I heard many stories about the area from my elderly clients, this is the story of one family which I have been given permission to tell you about.

Mabel Tarrant was born in North Woolwich in the 1920's, one of the ten children of William George Tarrant and his Suffolk born wife, Florence, who had come to London to work as a domestic as a young woman, which was the custom in the early 1900's.

William and Florence lived in Storey Street, North Woolwich, on the north bank of the Thames, not far from the Woolwich ferry landing stage where, daily, hundreds of people from the south side of the river would disembark from the free ferry to go to work in the docks, sugar factory of Tate and Lyles or the Submarine Cables factory and other such jobs situated in North Woolwich.



William Tarrant, a small wiry man, was a docker. He was not of the usual burly, muscely type that one thinks of being a docker but he earned his living by humping sheep carcasses, wrapped in their white muslin called "sheep shirts" from the frozen meat holds of the enormous ships from Australia and New Zealand.

In the twenties it was not easy to find regular work, unemployment was high but every day William would turn up at the dock gates with his docker's hook and dockers ticket and wait to be taken on for a days work or turned away. Fortunately William was always in regular work and always managed to earn enough to pay the rent, feed and clothe his wife and large family. William's family were his world, no pubs at the end of the day for him, every spare penny was spent on his children. Saturday afternoon he would take his children across the river on the ferry to Woolwich market where he would buy them oranges or sweets, toffees, liquorice or a toffee apple and perhaps a comic, money permitting. On a Sunday sometimes



William would take the kids up to Woolwich Barracks to see the soldiers on parade and William would tell them about their granddad, George William Tarrant, who had been a Sergeant Major in the Royal Horse Artillery, and their dad would tell them about how, as a child, he had lived in the barracks with his mum and his brothers and sisters.

Dockers are often thought of as being loud and rough, even wife beaters or drunks. But in William's house there was no bad language or bad manners, no one was ever allowed to use swear words. Life for the family was sweet. The children attended the local Storey Street School in the daytime and then after school playing with their friends in the street, or watching the great liners arriving and departing and seeing the sailors from all over the world, often in quite exotic, native costumes walking along the quayside. Sometimes the kids would go with their dad along the way to Cyprus, to have tea with their elderly aunt Slade.

In the long school holidays Florence would take all the kids down to her birthplace of Suffolk. William would put them on the Corona coach that took them to Stowmarket and from there they would travel to Penny Plot, their maternal grandmother's home, near the village of Battisford. The long hot summer days were spent amongst the thatched cottages and fields and country lanes of Suffolk, until finally it was time for them to return to London ready for the new school term. William only once went with his children to the village, being a Londoner through and through he didn't enjoy the quiet, country life and within the first week he had returned home to Woolwich.

Sadly this happy life was to come to an end with the start of WWII. Everything for the Tarrant family was to change drastically, as indeed it was for people all over the nation. Night after night bombs fell on Dockland, sleepless nights were spent down the Anderson shelter in the backyard. Daytime brought power failures due to the bomb damage, and endless queues for rationed goods. Most days, the now adult children would have to walk to work as the roads were impassable for vehicles and many a day the family would go to work without having a wash due to the water mains being severed.

The men of the docks were now put to other types of work and William was sent to work in the Woolwich Arsenal to help with munitions work like many of his friends and colleagues.

Times were hard for everyone including Williams's family. His eldest son Fred had been taken prisoner of war by the Japanese and daughter Doris had lost her young husband at Anzio.

William finally lost his house in the bombing and the family were moved with only what they were wearing at the time to live in Abbey Wood. Many an afternoon William would walk slowly along the road to the local church and here he would say a quiet prayer for the safe return of his son Fred.

Finally the war ended and William's prayers were answered, Fred returned home but he was a broken man, the years of imprisonment had effected him deeply, but William Tarrant was made of strong stuff, his father had been a soldier and father and son had both lived through sadness and hard times before and survived.

George William Tarrant had been born in 1855 in Lambeth and by 1861 both his parents, John and Emma Tarrant, were dead and George and his two sisters are shown on the census for that year as living with their uncle William Richardson, a sewer worker, and his family at 65 Railway Grove, Deptford. Ten years later George, now aged 18, was found at 1 Dawlish St Lambeth working as a domestic coachman at the home of Thomas Gibbins and his family. It appears that his work with horses decided George to join the Royal Horse Artillery; their headquarters were in Woolwich.

George, whose attestation papers were found in the National Archives at Kew, joined the Army on 27/1/1873, in Westminster, stating he was a groom and the following day, at Bow Street Police Court at 5.40pm. he swore the Oath of Allegiance to Queen Victoria.

George worked his way through the ranks from bombardier to corporal, then sergeant and finally sergeant major.



George served in Ireland and here, at the age of 22, he married an Irish lass named Catherine Connor. They had a daughter Ellen. Sadly Catherine was to die young and by 1881 George had married for a second time, a girl named Lily Golesworthy, whose father was a sergeant major in the Royal Artillery. Lily had been born in Nova Scotia but she was to marry George Tarrant on the 17th July 1881 at St Thomas church in Charlton. By December

of that year their first child, William George, was born and on the 8th February 1882 the couple took their son to St Mary Magdalene's Church, which stands on the south bank of the Thames opposite the southern landing stage of the Woolwich ferry, and had their first born christened. In August 1882 George Tarrant was sent to serve in Egypt for three months and it was here that he received the medal and clasp for the Tel el Kebir campaign. The couple went on to have sons George, Frederick and Sidney and a daughter Edith. But once again happiness was not to last for George, his second wife Lily died in 1892 leaving his family of six children motherless. William and George, the two eldest, were sent to the Duke of York Military School in Dover where they both received a good education, George went on to join the army but the medical officer would not pass William as fit for army service due to a heart murmur, although that didn't stop William humping sheep carcasses on his back for a good many years.

George Tarrant now left the army and after telling the discharge board that he was going to live in Charles Street, Woolwich. We know that by 1893 he had moved to North Woolwich and here he married his third wife, Mary Jane Callow. In 1901 the census shows George and Mary Jane living at 26 Hartingdon St, St Luke's, West Ham, with their two children, Alex and Mabel, both of whom on attaining adulthood, emigrated to Canada.

In 1905 the electoral rolls covering Storey St, North Woolwich, show George Tarrant for the first time, living at number nineteen and it was from this address in 1911 that George Tarrant's coffin, draped in the Union Jack, was to make its way to the local cemetery followed by his son William George carrying in his arms the tiny white coffin of his first born daughter, Florence, who was buried beside her granddad.

Months later, in the same year, Georges wife, Mary Jane, was also laid to rest near her husband.

George did not live long enough to see the outbreak of WW1 and his son Fred became a prisoner of war. Neither would he know that his grandson, also named Fred, was to suffer the same fate in WWII.

It is now 2007 and some of George's grandchildren, now in their eighties and nineties, continue to live in the local area. Two sisters in Plumstead, a brother in Abbey Wood, another in Eltham and the eldest sister in Essex. They have all seen so many changes to the area in their long lifetimes.

Gone are the docks where their dad worked and in its place is City Airport. The streets where they played as children are all changed and the Royal Artillery has left Woolwich after nearly 300 years, although the ferry continues to ply back and forth across the Thames and Woolwich market continues to supply us with fruit and veg.

I wonder what George Tarrant would think of all the changes? But, of course, this we will never know.

*This story is dedicated to the memory of my dear friend Mabel Tarrant who died this week, Wednesday, 8/8/2007.*

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# *The Unseen Raider*

*Morris Freedman*

Just over half a century ago a German Zeppelin slipped its moorings at a secret airship base in Belgium and flew up the Thames on the first mission of its kind in the history of civilization.

To bomb a crowded capital city, the City of London.

This was the LZ 38 commanded by Major Erich Linnarz which on 31 May, 1915 dropped high explosives and incendiary bombs around the city, killing a number of people and damaging houses and business premises.

Great Height

The airship flew at a great height and was apparently not seen because none of London's guns or searchlights came into action and the LZ 38 returned to base unharmed.

This was the first-ever air raid on any city in the world.

The first time Woolwich came under direct attack from the air was on 13 October 1915, when the Zeppelin L 14, commanded by Kapitanleutnant Bocker, dropped bombs on Woolwich Common and in the Arsenal.

Switched

This raid could have been even more disastrous than it was: the L14 narrowly missed colliding with another Zeppelin on its way to bomb Croydon.

Another direct attack on Woolwich came in August, 1916, when bombs also fell on Plumstead, Eltham, Blackheath and Deptford, and a month later Woolwich and Plumstead were bombed again but this time the raider was shot down by a night-fighter pilot from Joyce Green, Dartford. (This was the L 32, which crashed near Billericay in Essex)

The German High Command hurriedly revised their ideas about the usefulness of Zeppelins after several of them had been destroyed by our fighter pilots, and when Commander Mathy, the greatest Zeppelin commander of the 1914-18 war, was shot down at Potters Bar, they switched instead to long-range bombers.

Casualties

In June 1917, fourteen Gothas made a daring daylight attack on London, flying in diamond formation from Tottenham to Woolwich, dropping their bombs indiscriminately, as they flew.

The raid caused disproportionately heavy casualties because people stood in the streets to watch the raiders instead of taking shelter.

The last raid on London of the First World War was on the night of 20 May 1918, and lasted several hours.

Perhaps it is this last big raid that sticks in the minds of people old enough to remember the 1914-18 bombing and makes them imagine that the arrival of enemy aircraft over Woolwich was a common, almost nightly occurrence.

In fact in the four years of the war, London was attacked only 36 times, 12 times by Zeppelins.

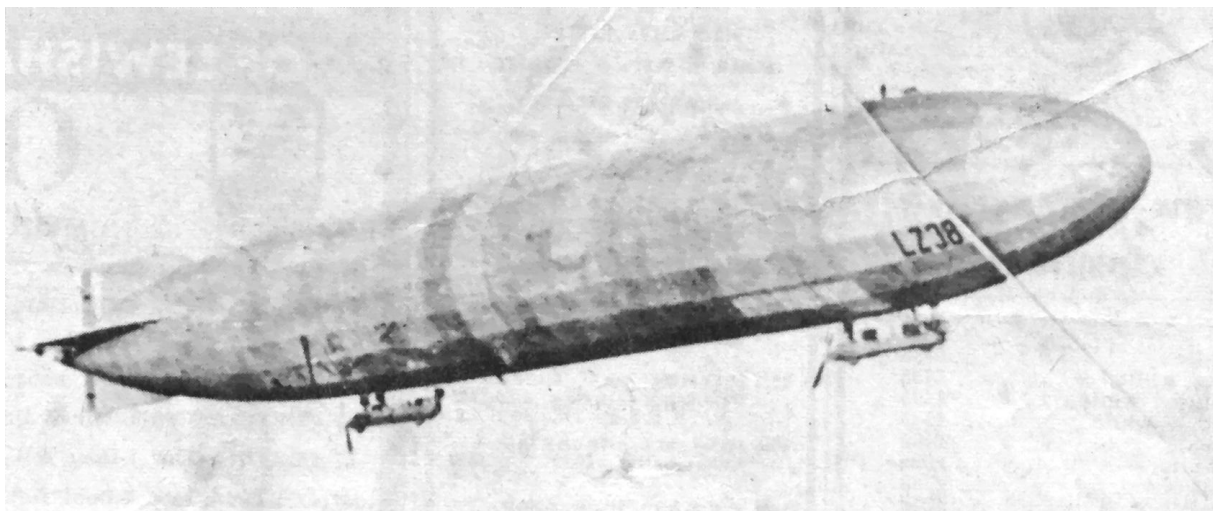
How bad were these raids? According to official records something like 530 people were killed and 1,260 wounded. A total of 9,000 bombs, high explosives and incendiaries, were dropped.

The Zeppelins that bombed London were powered by six engines developing 1,000 h.p. with a top speed of 70 m.p.h. They could carry nearly 40 tons of bombs a distance of 3,000 miles and fly up to 12,000 feet.

Compared with the 1940 blitz the air attacks of 1914 - 18 were insignificant, but it cannot be denied that they generated a considerable amount of fear and by 1918 had become a serious menace.



*The Zeppelin Crew and below is Zeppelin L38 in 1915.*



# *The Village*

*Julia King*

Julia King put together a small booklet that was a collection of:

'Some Recollections of High Street Plumstead and The History of a Local Family. (1994)'

Here are some interesting extracts from her book collection. Starting with this item from her book's 'Introduction.'

The coming of the railway resulted in the future development of the gradual urbanisation of the High Street, Plumstead, Kent. (Later London SE18)

The North Kent Line was opened in July 1949. But it was another ten years before Plumstead had its own station, built at the head of the ancient Griffin Manorway.

Plumstead lies to the east of Woolwich and about eleven miles south-east of central London. The area grew rapidly during the last quarter of the 19th Century. Streets of terraced houses being laid out to provide housing for the growing number of local workmen.

Prominent buildings of the High Street, constructed during this period being;

Police Station (old) 1894; High Street School (Bannockburn) 1885; Library 1903;

Fire Station, 1907; and Plumstead Baths, 1907. \*(Now closed)

My mother, Anne Day, (nee Holman) recollections of the High Street are between the years 1912- 1936.

Born on 7th November 1907 at Izane Road, Bexleyheath, Kent to a family whose considerable engineering skills were applied to the manufacture of armaments in the Woolwich Arsenal, where both her grandfathers, Peter Bayne and James William Holman, served their apprenticeships during the 1850's and also her father, Arthur Holman, in 1894.

Annie Bayne, born in 1893, mother of Anne, could recall that in her childhood the High Street was no more than an open stony street situated between farms and cottages which locals referred to as 'The Village'.

Plumstead 1994.

*\*Editor: Since been demolished.*

**Julia then continues in her book with outlining her family connections to Plumstead.**

She continues...

'From 1928 the family home of James Joseph Clark, master baker, son of Joseph Henshall Clark, bakers of Plumstead. James mother Theresa Ruth Clark (nee Errey) born 1869, grew up in Farningham, Kent, where her father worked as a foreman in the local mill. After marrying Joseph Henshall Clark they were involved in the bakery and confectionery business'.

**(A newspaper article published in 1952 tells the following story)**

'A foggy December morning sixty years ago brought despondency to a young Mr and Mrs Clark. Recently married, they had put all their money into a bakery and confectionery business at 152 Plumstead Road, and it was their first day of the new venture. At the end of

the day it was found that the turn over had been very good, and a new business was born. Things continued to flourish and this year marks its diamond jubilee – now it is JH Clark and sons Ltd – and the diamond wedding of Mr and Mrs Clark'.

The first with electricity.

In 1899 the first branch was opened at 98 Plumstead High Street and was the first shop in the High Street to have electric lighting. Other branches were opened later at 6 Lakedale Road and 278 Plumstead High Street, and a limited company was formed in 1915. The business is now controlled by PG Rowland (son in law) and Mr BJ Clark (grandson). The bakery closed in 1956.

Annie Day (nee Holman), my mother, attended Plumstead Central School, Methodist Church Sunday School. Plumstead, Kent.

The Sunday School held outings to Cook's Farm, " We walked all the way to the farm and in the grounds of this farm were swings and see-saws. The Sunday School participated in races and games all afternoon. Finishing the day eating cakes and sandwiches and drinking tea, supplied from the small hut situated farm "(now Old Park Road). (*See story: Cooks Farm*)

**From her mother's recollections in the book is this story, entitled, 'School Days – Bannockburn'.**

'I went to High Street School in 1912. It was a three-storied building, Infants on the ground floor, Girls on the 1st floor and Boys on the top floor. (The top floor was destroyed by a firebomb in WWII and was not replaced when the school was renovated).

Children started school in mixed classes at the age of four years and began the day assembled in the hall to sing hymns and say prayers. My favourite hymn was 'Jesus wants me for a sunbeam'.

Settling down in classrooms we learned the alphabet by singing it and went on to recite the 'times tables' every morning.

School commenced at 9 am with a mid morning break 'p[ay time' and finished for lunch at 12 noon, returning at 1 pm until 4 pm.

We sat in pairs at wooden desks with a hard wooden plank for a seat. Slates and slate pencils were used for writing and arithmetic. Each desk also had two inkwells and two pens. Every Monday morning the 'Monitors' collected the inkwells and washed them and refilled them.

On reaching seven years of age the girls went to the 1st floor and the boys to the 2nd.

Classes were called 'Standards' finishing at Standard 7 at the school leaving age of 14 years.

Girls and boys had separate playgrounds, which bordered on Ceres Road and Bannockburn Road.

When the school bell stopped ringing the pupils fell into line and then marched upstairs to their appropriate classrooms. Everyone stood to attention as the teacher entered the classroom and after prayers sat down.

Morning started with arithmetic followed by reading, writing and spelling. During playtime we dashed about playing touch he, netball, rounders and hopscotch. The boys concentrated on football, cricket and leapfrog.

Discipline was very strict; silence was the rule and if things got noisy we had to sit with our hands on our heads or folded behind our backs. In some cases girls had to stand in the corner facing the wall and as a last resort were banished to the corridor to await a dreaded visit from 'Madam', (as we called the Headmistress). She was elderly, dressed in a black dress with a white lace neckpiece held in place by a thin white whalebone under each ear. It usually resulted in the offender being debarred from playing and made to write 'lines'. Despite the strict requirements we were happy at school, especially when taken on local walks on Plumstead or Wynn's Common or along Wickham Lane to walk through the Rhubarb fields to Dick Turpin's Cave and on to Bostall heath.

If the walk was on the opposite side of Wickham Lane we crossed King's Highway to the Brickfields and then went up to 'Fanny on the Hill.'

Once we went to North Woolwich via the ferry and sat in the gardens watching the busy traffic of boats and ships sailing to the docks.

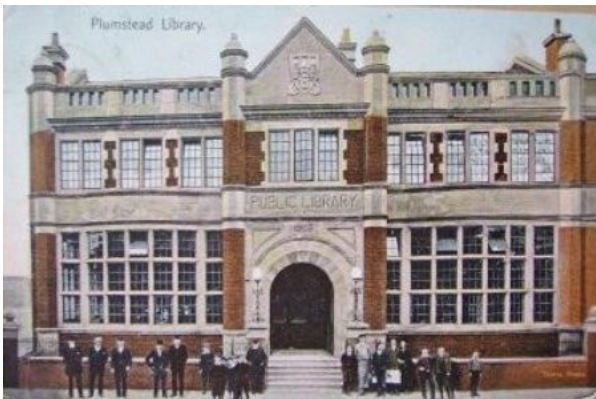
On reaching eleven years of age, bright pupils took an examination for a few scholarship places at the Kings Warren School known as 'The Brown School' (because of the colour of their uniforms) on Plumstead Common, or were taken for an interview at Bloomfield Road Secondary School, which accepted girls from all parts of the Borough.

At both schools it meant staying on until sixteen years of age and many parents could not afford it and most of the girls left at fourteen to go to work in local factories, shops or domestic service.

Kings Warren School, Waverley School and Church Manorway School amalgamated to become Plumstead Manor School, on the original Kings Warren site in the mid 1960's.

Bloomfield Road Secondary School for Girls became Bloomfield Road School for Boys. And is currently the Woolwich Polytechnic Upper School.

Annie left Bloomfield School for Girls in the summer of 1922 at age fifteen years. She applied to the Civil Service and became a Probationer in the Central Telegraph Office, St Martins le



Grand, London. The open top tram to Woolwich was bumpy and slow so Annie found it quicker to run all the way to Plumstead Station.

She travelled to London on a 'cheap workman's' 8d ticket from Plumstead Railway Station.

The tram stop outside 206 High Street Plumstead was later moved to outside Plumstead Library and Museum.'

### **Further recollections from Annie Day of Brewery Road, Plumstead, Kent.**

Annie remembers the election campaign for William Crooks in the early 1900's, standing at the window listening to the band -jumping up and down and knocking over and smashing her mother's ornate ceramic pot, which held a giant aspidistra, which had been a valued wedding present.

The local cinema she recalls: 'Saturday morning pictures, price 1d, known as the 'Bug Rush'. The polite version of the local residents was 'The Rush'. This cinema was situated on the

corner of Garibaldi Street. Children of the 1950's referred to it as 'The Flea Pit'. On entering the cinema the children were given mint humbugs. When they all got tired of sucking them they used them as missiles to aim at the unfortunate pianist Mr Rowlands. The Ushers would come to the front of the cinema and threaten to throw out anybody who threw another one'.

These premises became Radio Rentals.

The Plaza Cinema (formally a church) later became the site of Woolworth's, in the High Street.

Plumstead Central School Hall held lantern (slide) films.

Annie also recalls an air raid in the First World War. (*See story: Unseen Raider*)

She was asked by her mother to go to 'Millers' General Store to buy some biscuits (unbeknown to her mother) this was during an air raid. The shop closed but her mother did not believe her and she was scolded. Millers were situated on the corner of Speranza Street and Riverdale Road (off Plumstead High Street). On the opposite corner was Hollingsworth Bakers, who baked bread and cakes on the premises and ground their own flour.

She also remembers the Red Lion Public House on the High Street where, after Sunday School, Annie and Arthur would buy a pint of shrimps or winkles for tea from the stall outside this pub.

Annie's mother recalls when she was first married and went to live at Bexleyheath. The Plume of Feathers public house was where the horse drawn trams started off their route.

Cattle were driven along the High Street to Abbey Wood abattoir and on one occasion one beast escaped and men clambered onto a tram to take chase of the animal.

Drunks were wheeled on stretchers and were taken to Plumstead Police Station to recover.

### **Recollections from Emily Bayne, aunt of Annie Day.**

Emily Day was born in 1881. In September 1900 she was received as a practitioner at the Woolwich Infirmary, later St Nicholas Hospital, Tewson Road. Her certificate of training is dated 26th October 1903 and is signed by Dr Walter Boulter, Medical Superintendent and Helena Gooding, Matron.

She trained under Dr Boulter. For operations he wore an old black tailored coat with buttons at the wrist, which he undid and turned back the cuff when he was about to operate, (the coat was rather blood stained).

During the first operation she witnessed, which was the dismemberment of a foot, she followed the operation with interest until Dr Boulter threw the foot into a bucket, at which she fainted.

A well known local midwife, nurse Best, who eventually owned a chemist shop in the High Street, delivered Arthur Holman Jnr at the family home in Brewery Road.

Annie Holman can remember when they came to live in the High Street in 1912. Nurse Best resided at 201 High Street. The practice of Dr Robert Holmes was opposite the Plumstead Library.

She also has witnessed in recent years, the demolition of the very old cottages that were premises to Watson's Laundry and Christian Chessman's Bakery (in their final years as a fruit and vegetable shop) and Ayres the Bakers. These shops were adjacent to the Volunteer Public House and adjoined the courtyard of the Plumstead Fire Station.

In 1989 the Victorian Police Station at the junction of Riverdale Road and Plumstead High Street and the seven adjoining cottages were pulled down to make way for the New Plumstead Police Station, which was officially opened by The Princess Royal on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1991.

In 1912 the occupants of these dwellings were:

218 High Street J Muslin, Taylor.  
220 " Frank Stubbington, Bootmaker.  
222 " Henry Smith, Hairdresser.  
224 " Mrs EM Brunning, Confectioner.  
226 " Arthur Brunning, Tobacconist.  
228 " William Cook, Ironmonger.  
230 " James Nelson & sons, Butcher.

St Nicholas Hospital, which was closed in 1986, was finally demolished in 1992. A new housing estate is in the process of being built on this site and should be completed in 1994.

The former Woolwich Union Infirmary, which was built between 1872-1874, consisted of three ward blocks, with central staff quarters, kitchen, stores and offices. A further wing was added before 1900 and in 1902 a nurse's home was completed, standing on the rising ground behind the eastern block. Many other additions and alterations were made in this century; a new ward block in 1951 and an X-ray and accident department were built between 1957 and 1965.

The Woolwich Union Workhouse, erected by the Board of Guardians between 1870-1872, was demolished in 1975.

During the Jubilee of the London County Council it was transformed into a home for aged men. The building, during the Second World War, was requisitioned for the use of a furniture store and in 1948 became a rest centre for the homeless, also known as 158A Plumstead High Street.

Plumstead is now awaiting the demolition of the Turkish and Russian Vapour Baths and the former Plumstead Swimming pools in Speranza Street, which will again alter the appearance and character of the High Street.

### **Some interesting family history notes.**

Arthur Holman, father of Annie Day was born 2nd May 1879.

He started work as an apprentice engineer at the Royal Arsenal. His father had obtained an apprenticeship for his son Richard Holman, but the weekend before taking it up, Richard absconded to join the Royal Navy at Chatham. After consulting his work mates, Arthur's father was advised to substitute another son in his place. So Arthur Holman served his apprenticeship in the name of his brother and for the rest of his life was known as 'Dick Holman'. On completion of his apprenticeship he worked for various local firms, including Vickers of Erith and the Co-op at Woolwich. At the outbreak of the First World War he returned to the Arsenal and explained his real name was Arthur and got the matter sorted out.

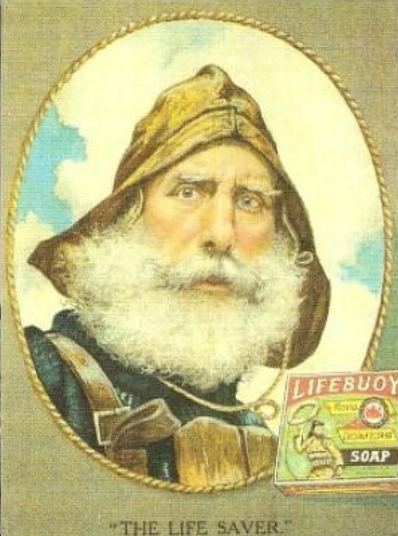
James William Holman, paternal grandfather of Annie Day, served his apprenticeship in the Arsenal at Woolwich and became a skilled engine fitter and turner. In the early 1880's the family lived in Thames View Terrace, Plumstead, (between Chestnut Rise and Piedmont

Road). His son Arthur remembers that his mother, Mary Holman (nee Witcher) would send him to look down across the fields to see if his father was crossing the stile at the bottom of the Orchard Road, because then it would be time to put the kettle on.

Peter Bayne, maternal grandfather of Annie Day, born 1845, lived at 37 Glyndon Road, Plumstead, Kent. He began his employment at the Woolwich Royal Arsenal during the 1850's, as young lad of ten years old, in the Brass Foundry. Eventually he served an apprenticeship and became a skilled Fitter. His daughter, Annie Bayne, can remember her father going to the Royal Arsenal at six in the morning and returning home for breakfast at 8 am then returning to work. During the later part of his service at the Royal Arsenal he used to mount the interior components of various shells on velvet to show to the cadets from the Royal Academy. Often, when the cadets had gone, so had most of the exhibits and he had to go to the Academy to retrieve them.

Ann Caroline Bayne, grandmother of Annie Day, married Peter Bayne, came from an army family stationed at the Woolwich Artillery Barracks. She travelled to India in the 1840's with her father's regiment and can remember returning to Greenwich by steam train, then by rowing boat to Woolwich Reach because trains only came as far as Greenwich then.





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# R A D I O

## GENERAL FORCES

6.30 a.m.: News; Records.  
 7: Record Album.  
 8: News; Records  
 8.30: Music in the Morning.  
 9: News: London Calling.  
 9.30: Records.  
 10: Wagner.  
 10.30: Band of Royal Corps of Signals.  
 11: Auld Scotch Sangs.  
 11.30: Billy Cotton.  
 12: News; Service  
 12.15: Music for All.  
 1: News; Records  
 1.20: Will Hay.  
 1.50: Parliamentary Summary.  
 2: Victory Music-Hall.  
 3.15: Chief Inspector French's Cases.

3.30: Melody Lingers On.  
 4: News; Navy Mixture.  
 5: News; Dorset Farmer.  
 5.30: Facts and Figures.  
 5.50: Scottish Orch  
 7: News; Celebrations Sound Picture.  
 7.15: Orchestra  
 8: Off the Map  
 8.30: A d e l e Dixon.  
 9: News; Midland Light Orch.  
 9.45: Pre-Service Boxing.  
 9.55: Sandy Macpherson.  
 10: Welsh Half-Hour.  
 10.30: Reg. Purs-glove.  
 10.58: News.

## HOME

7 a.m.: News.  
 7.15: Exercises.  
 7.30: Records.  
 7.55: Lift Up Your Hearts!  
 8: News; Around the House.  
 8.20: Records.  
 9: A Home Guard Looks Back.  
 9.15: Monday Morning Medley  
 10.5: Schools  
 10.15: Service.  
 10.30: Foursomes.  
 11: Schools.  
 11.20: Jose Iturbi.  
 12.30: Break for Music.  
 1: News; Arctic Escort.  
 1.30: London Theatre Orch.  
 1.40: Schools.  
 3: Marriage of Figaro.

3.45: British Band of A.E.F.  
 4.15: Hunting of the Snark.  
 4.30: Jack Simpson.  
 5: News in Welsh.  
 5.20: Children's Hour  
 6: News; Massed Brass Bands.  
 7: Billy Cotton.  
 7.40: The Invasion  
 8: Monday Night at Eight  
 9: News; Soldiers of Britain.  
 10.5: Elgar's 2nd Symphony.  
 11: Orchestra.  
 11.40: Buddy Featherstonhaugh.  
 12-12.20: News.

# THE TOP TEN

- This Last Week Week
- Chart compiled by "The Record And Show Mirror"
- 1 (1) **Cathy's Clown**—Everly Brothers (Warner)
  - 2 (2) **Do You Mind**—Anthony Newley (Decca)
  - 3 (3) **Someone Else's Baby/Big Time**—Adam Faith (Parlophone)
  - 4 (4) **Fall In Love With You**—Cliff Richard (Columbia)
  - 5 (5) **Handy Man**—Jimmy Jones (MGM)
  - 6 (10) **Shazam**—Duane Eddy (London)
  - 7 (8) **Sweet Nuthin's**—Brenda Lee (Brunswick)
  - 8 (6) **Stuck On You**—Elvis Presley (RCA)
  - 9 (7) **My Old Man's A Dustman**—Lonnie Donegan (Pye)
  - 10 (9) **Standing On The Corner**—King Brothers (Parlophone)

News



Chronicle

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1930.

# *The Woodman Pub And Bus Terminus*

*Colin Weightman*

I remember as children when we looked for matchbox labels and cigarette packets for our collections. We also looked for the 'Turf' cigarette packets because on the inside drawer were pictures, one in a packet of ten, two in a packet of twenty. We would glean these collectables from the upstairs floors of the No. 176, 177, 54s and, not forgetting the 177a buses, that all parked at the Woodman pub and bus terminal.

We used to sit on the old stone horse trough that was situated there with the drinking fountain that had the chained metal drinking cup attached at the front of the pub. Whilst we waited there, between the arrival and departure of the buses, we would collect car number plate number plates. It was very popular with kids in those days, when the volume of traffic was very light. Kids doing this hobby nowadays would need to be very good at speedwriting!

As each bus pulled up at the last bus stop on the opposite side of the road to drop off the passengers it would then drive along and turn around at the lamp standard with the drinking fountain (complete with a lead cup on a chain) situated in the road at the junction of Lakedale and Winn's Common Roads, and return to the Woodman to park. The driver and conductor then went off to the café. We would then hop aboard and go upstairs, where passengers were allowed to smoke. Swiftly, we'd scan the seats and floor, picking up any discarded matchboxes or matchbook packets and any unusual cigarette packets, before descending to the bottom deck to check it out as well. We used to find the occasional discarded daily newspaper and proudly take them home for our parents to read, very resourceful lads we were.



*The lamp standard and drinking fountain, (Late Victorian times) where the buses turned around at the corner of Lakedale and Winn's Common Roads.*

*Photo: Greenwich Heritage Centre.*

We even found the odd coin, which was very quickly converted into chewing gum from the penny Wrigley's chewing gum machine that hung on the fence outside the little café where the buses turned around. We would check to see if the arrow was pointing forward on the knob of the chewing gum machine because, when it was, it would dispense TWO packets of gum for the price of one penny. So, if the knob was near to pointing to the front, we would wait, ever hopeful, until some one came and bought some gum, thus turning the knob and the arrow in our favour.

This café was where the bus drivers and their clippies went to have their cuppa, before they headed off back again on their return route.

During the 1950's when the London smog's were bad I remember they put large flaming torches spaced a few yards apart to help guide the buses round the lamp standard where they turned to go round to the Woodman terminal. Those terrible smogs killed many folk, in particular many elderly folk died, mainly from respiratory related illnesses.

Incidentally, 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 indeed were the thrills of the wee Common kids. (See story: *Going Down The 'Oller*)

Helping himself  
to good health.....



He knows what's good! Mother knows, too, that Hovis is, of all breads, the most nourishing and delicious. It contains the LIFE and heart of the wheat. It builds bone and muscle. No other bread is so rich in the health-giving vitamins as well as in Phosphates which feed brain and nerves. And so digestible, too!

**TO HOUSEWIVES:**  
There is 25% of added wheat-germ in HOVIS a quarter of its entire bulk. Let your next loaf be HOVIS, but for your own satisfaction, be sure it is HOVIS.

**HōVIS**  
(Trade Mark)

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BEST BAKERS BAKE IT.

HOVIS LTD. LONDON & MACCLESFIELD

# *The Woolwich Empire Remembered*

*Colin Weightman*

My dad had his fireman's ticket, as he was a fireman during some of the war years with the Auxiliary Fire Service. By law every theatre had to have a resident fireman when open to the public. (This was because of some theatre fire accidents many years before, resulting in large losses of life)

My dad worked as a part time fireman at the old Woolwich Empire of an evening. After working there he'd then travel into London on the Southern Railway where he worked nightshift on the 'Permanent Way' doing maintenance work on the London Underground tube rail system. (This is why we moved later to East London, Manor Park, because it was handier for dad to get to and from his night work.)

We would get free complimentary tickets because my dad worked there. I would usually take a mate along to see a show. We would have to sit way up in the gods because we were not allowed in the stalls for some reason. So there we sat, high up above, looking down and snickering behind our hands when the nude show started. In those days the nudes were not allowed (by law) to move and were only allowed to pose whilst remaining perfectly still. The stage curtain would open to reveal a posed nude, usually lit with coloured lights. Then the curtain would close, then shortly, they would open again to reveal another differently posed, nude.

My dad sat in a little reception office, just inside the stage door at the side of the theatre. Now and again mum would ask me to take him his sandwiches for work. I would go in the stage door to deliver them to him.

On one of these occasions I remember my eyes nearly falling out of my head as the nudes walked passed me! One had just come off the stage and another was going on. They both swept past me, oh so very close, with just a page of a flapping newspaper held around their important 'below and above' bits, with lots of bare bits on the sides and in between! This, being a young boy, was my very first view of a naked lady!

However... when we were up in the gods there they were on stage, posed for gawking at... and boy did we gawk!

The Woolwich Empire was a very popular venue for the many servicemen who were billeted in the Woolwich Barracks. So you can see why the nudes would have been such a popular part of the theatre's programme.

The Empire had a good variety of acts. Being a youngster, I enjoyed the juggling acts and the magicians. I especially enjoyed the breathtaking balancing acts. They even had trapeze artists, very nerve racking to watch; especially as the music, played live from the music pit situated directly in front of the stage, slowed and went into a drum roll, as the trapeze artist did some death defying leap or triple somersault as the cymbals crashed. Safety nets extended over the top of the audience. I always enjoyed the comedy acts. There were a good many comedians on the stage in those days before television slowly got established in more

and more homes.

When TVs finally were established it was the end for most of these comedians who travelled around performing at all the numerous city theatres and towns throughout the country. They could tell the same jokes at every different theatre venue and get a fresh laugh. But on a TV show a joke routine could only be told once. After that, a new fresh joke routine was required to be ready for the very next performance! Only a very few comedians successfully made this transition such as Benny Hill, Morecambe and Wise and Tony Hancock and a few others.

I remember on one special occasion when aged about seven I actually performed on the Empire stage in front of the audience. This event came about because my dad had jacked it up for me to go on the stage with a performing artist named Mr Blow. He was well known in those days. He blew up balloons twisting them into different shapes, usually animals. He acted the clown, dressed in a full-length old scruffy fur coat and a straw hat. On this particular evening I was seated in the front stall seats for the first time ever! Dad told me that when Mr Blow asked the audience for someone to give him a hand, I was to quickly put up my hand and volunteer. Finally the moment arrived and, right on queue, I shot up my hand and I was asked to accompany him on stage.

Nervously I climbed the small stairs at the side of the stage and walked on to the stage. A little girl had also been chosen and we were both standing there with the audience applauding us. Mr Blow took both our hands and asked us our names. I then had to skip the length of the stage and back again with him. The little girl did the same. Again the audience applauded us. When I looked out from the stage the lights were really dazzling in my eyes. Mr Blow then went straight into his routine, blowing up the long thin balloons and twisting them into animal shapes whilst he made funny faces and let the odd balloon fly off like a squid. He made one for me and handed it to me. I whispered to him, asking him if he would also make one for my little sister who was at home. He turned to the audience and told them what I had just requested and they all laughed and clapped loudly. Things were so much simpler in those days.

My dad got to know and meet a lot of well-known theatre celebrities in the course of his part time job as fireman at the Woolwich Empire. Occasionally, some of the celebrities stayed at our home in Sladedale Road. I remember one couple that stayed with us. They had a very large python snake they used in their act. It was kept in a large wicker basket with leather buckled down lid. I was allowed to see it close up and even touch it!

As a child of around five I remember going to the Empire with my older brother Mark to see a colour film of the FA Cup Final, the winners being Charlton Athletic. This would have been around late 1948 ish, I think.

Now, if anything made our mum happy it was the Irish connection of the famous. She would say, "Bing Crosby is from an Irish background and James Cagney." He was a real favourite of hers. My brother Mark remembers a character that performed there by the name of Jack Doyle. A smile would light up mum's face followed by a chuckle when the name Jack Doyle came up.

Jack Doyle was born in Cobh, near Cork City, Ireland, where he made a reputation as a

brilliant boxer and a fine tenor. In 1933 at a time when he was earning 600 pounds a week as a singer, he could draw 90,000 fans to London's White City to watch him fight.

Jack Doyle appeared at the Woolwich Empire when dad was part time fireman there. Mark remembers dad telling mum about Jack who had been booked there to sing. This was in the early to mid 1950s from Mark's recollection.

When Mark was working in the Hermit Road Barber Shop, in Canning Town, around 1960-1, he overheard a customer mention that he'd seen the sad state of the once, so handsome, Jack Doyle, at the Chingford Greyhound Track.

Jack's only vice was alcohol. He married the famous Mexican actress Movita and they raised hell together. But a growing drink problem proved too strong for Jack. He struggled with it until he eventually died, destitute and shoeless, on the streets of London, in 1978.

(There is a sad song called, 'The Contender'. It is a tribute in song to Jack's life.)

Years later, the Woolwich Empire was demolished, this was to be the sad fate of so many of the old theatres, once so popular, throughout the country's towns and cities.

In its place they built, at a huge cost, to the ratepayers' horror, a multi-storied auto-stacker car park. Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret was there to officially open it, along with other important dignitaries. The button was duly pushed and the very first car went up the lift to be auto-stacked. The auto-stacker jammed and everyone went home. After much more work and lots more controversy the problem could not be fixed and eventually it was demolished, unused, at a further huge cost to the angry ratepayers.



# *The Woolwich Poem*

*Roger Jewiss*

(Formerly of Bostall Lane and Shooters Hill Schools and many Woolwich area football teams)

*The pie stall in Beresford Square, The Arsenal, Seimans, Dockyards all  
Soldiers in blue shirts everywhere, Bloomfield Road and Shooters Hill,  
Ferry boats with engines on view Boys in blazers, ringworm caps  
Cuffs and Garretts and Furlongs too. Poly Hall dances, decent chaps.  
The Co-op with their 'divi' cheques Learn to dance in Vincent Road  
West Ham Speedway, stock car wrecks Beasley's drays with heavy load  
Gardner's and the Scotch Wool shop Charlton Athletic in Division One  
Long queues at each tram stop. Saturday morning pictures, always fun.  
The 696 and the 698 To the Odeon and Granada people flock  
Trolley busses were never late Organ music, not all this rock  
Up to town on the tram Strongman performs outside the Sally  
Cakes from Hemming's, filled with jam. Wish I could afford a Raleigh.  
The Co-op baker, horse and cart Shakespeare, jazz for your pleasure  
Always made an early start Greenberg suits, made to measure  
Lemonade outside the 'Who-dy' Maybloom, Engineers & the Co-op Clubs  
Borough Sports Day, Punch and Judy. Lyons teashops and Beasley pubs.  
Police patrols, Wolesleys, Humbers, and Manze's eels, still all alive  
Old policemen with low numbers Town Hall dances, mustn't jive  
P.C. Brandon, a radio star Ferry boat to North Woolwich Beach  
Powis Street and hardly a car. Sidney Ross, toys out of reach.  
School football on Bostall gun site Barnard's Theatre in Beresford Street  
Jack Offord, teaching us right Auntie's opposite, where we all meet  
Day trips out to Danson Park amongst us the Sally Army pass  
Walking home safely in the dark. A seaman home, eats a glass.  
Where is the Woolwich that I knew?  
The Woolwich in which I grew?  
A victim now of developers' taste,  
An historic town laid to waste.*

*Reproduced with the kind permission of the author Roger Jewiss.*

# *The Woolwichers.*

Recalled by

*Margaret Gaffney*

about an English 'invasion' of Greenock.



*Greenock, Scotland.*

I had always known that my friend's grandfather was a Woolwicher. She had told me that he had come to the Greenock area when he was six years old. His father had been one of the workers who was moved from the Woolwich Arsenal in London to work in the Clyde Torpedo Factory in Greenock in 1910.

Recently I began to wonder about these workers who were forced to move to a country they knew little about, and to towns that were so far away from their own homes. Why did they have to come to Greenock? How many workers arrived from Woolwich, and was there any opposition from the local population?

All these questions came to mind after I had spoken to a woman who said that her mother had been a Woolwicher who had married a Greenockian after moving north to work. They had lived in sub-let or shared accommodation in Greenock, but had eventually been housed in chalets, which had been erected beside the torpedo factory in the nearby Battery Park. "The chalets were very comfortable," she said. "We had a nice garden. There were leisure facilities and lots of gala days were arranged by the residents. I remember it as a very happy time." The term "Woolwichers" was actually a misnomer, as they had also come from Plumstead, Chatham and other areas of London. However, they were all Woolwichers as far as the people of the Clydeside towns of Greenock, Gourock and Port Glasgow were concerned. I decided to find out more about these reluctant - as most of them were - immigrants to Greenock.

I was surprised to find that very little had been written about the Woolwichers. Fortunately, the local archive library, the Watt, came to the rescue with a wonderful machine that shows

copies of the local newspaper The Greenock Telegraph going back many years. I found in news items much of the information I was looking for. However, the best source as to the feeling and fears of local residents and the English workers was in the newspapers letters page.

Many of the letters from the local correspondents were welcoming, "Hundreds in Greenock and Gourock will welcome our fellow subjects when they come," wrote one magnanimous writer. Another from Woolwich, from "a wife of one of the invaders" wrote, "I am looking forward to the lovely scenery, the watersports and our new neighbours". However, there was some bitterness and recrimination, as two officials from London had come to spy out the land for the English workers, and their report had been less than favourable. The Woolwichers had been shocked by the information relayed back from their "spies". The tenement houses with their "hole in the wall" beds that existed in Greenock, and where they would perhaps have to stay, appalled them.

The high infant mortality rate and the picture that the officials painted of barefooted, rickety Greenock children was most disturbing to them, and they protested vehemently to their Admiralty employers. But the decision was irrevocable. The Admiralty had wanted more divergence in the production of weapons of war in case hostilities broke out - the Great War was just four years away - and, most important of all, nearby was the aptly-named Loch Long which was the ideal place for testing torpedoes.



The Greenock Torpedo Factory as it was around the early years of the century.

Author. I. L. Dow wrote in his book Greenock, "There were howls of protest from the Woolwichers" However, Dow did not elaborate on this, so it was The Greenock Telegraph that gave more insight into the controversy. An anonymous correspondent wrote, "Why don't the Woolwichers stop grumbling? Do they want us to move Loch Long to Woolwich?" This letter went on in a most sarcastic vein. Another writer said he had once worked in Woolwich and some parts of it were worse than Greenock. The editor of The Greenock Telegraph tried to put over both sides of the argument and allowed a free expression of opinion in his paper. The correspondence went on for months.

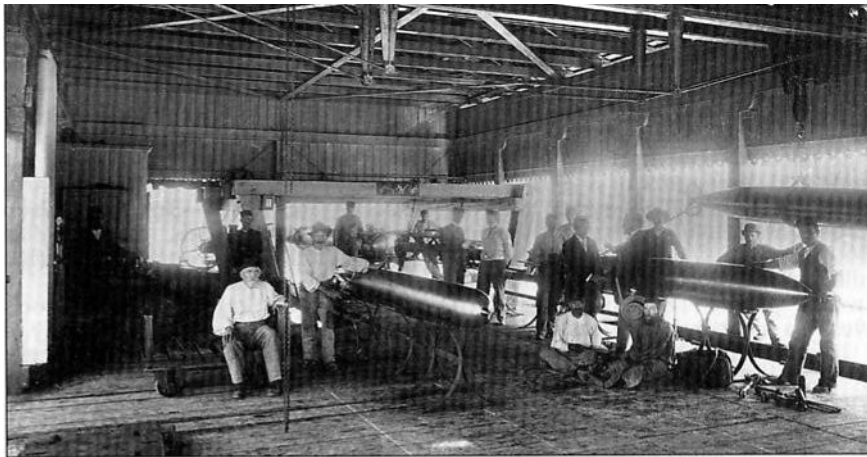
It was true that the 700 skilled workers coming to Greenock from the Woolwich factory had better living conditions down south than they were to experience in Greenock.

Many of them had to go into sub-lets when they arrived. There had been a plan put forward to build suitable houses in the Newark Street area of the town but home-owners there

protested that it would spoil their amenity, so they organised a petition which they presented to Sir Hugh Shaw-Stewart, the feudal landlord, and the plan was subsequently abandoned. Only 144 houses were built in Serpentine Way in Roxburgh Street. These were called "English Rows" as they were constructed in the "Coronation Street" style of dwelling.

At a Burns Supper in Gourock in January 1910 Provost MacMillan said, "The men and their families should be housed in the boundaries of Greenock so that extra taxation would be kept in the town." All this rhetoric was fine but T.W. Hamilton, in his book 'How Greenock Grew', wrote: "There had not been much attempt to provide adequate housing for the incoming workers. Builders had begun to suffer a state of stagnation and few houses were being built." He also wrote: "The Greenock area had the invasion of the Highlanders in the 18th century, the invasion of the Irish in the 19th century and in the early 20th century we had the invasion of the Englishmen?"

And so in June 1910 500 workers came from Woolwich Arsenal to work in the Greenock Torpedo Factory, followed a few months later by 200 more. Like the Highlanders and the Irish before them, they settled down, albeit reluctantly, into the district.



A group of workers posing for the camera beside shiny new weapons of war.

Housing was a problem for many years, and when the Admiralty built houses for them in the Cove Farm area of Gourock - Rodney, Nelson and Grenville Roads, named after famous admirals - there was a sigh of relief all round.

It must be said that the Woolwichers were a conscientious body of people. They added, like the Highlanders and the Irish, a new dimension to the area. One of them, Mr Rees-Pedlar, became Provost of Gourock between 1933-37. The Buckeridge Light Orchestra gave many successful concerts in the district. Its conductor, Frank Buckeridge, was the son of a Woolwicher as were many members of the orchestra.

At the end of the working day crowds of men from the factory head off home.



Once the English workers had arrived, the residents of Greenock, Gourock and Port Glasgow seemed to have accepted their presence and little animosity appeared to have been shown to them. This may have been because the Woolwichers were loyal and hard-working members of their churches and good citizens of their host towns.

However, I did speak to the daughter of a Woolwicher who said that at first her mother was very unhappy in Gourock. She refused to go shopping; "Nobody understands what I say, and I don't understand them either!" Her husband had to go to the shops for three months before she would attempt it again. She and her husband, however, brought up nine children in Gourock -most of them born in their house in Rodney Road-and they lived the rest of their lives in the town. How many of the Woolwichers returned to England is not recorded, but many of them did stay and ultimately got to like, if not love, their adopted home.

The Greenock Torpedo Factory closed in 1959 when the establishment, with its workers, relocated to Alexandria in Dunbartonshire.

*This story first appeared in the Scots Magazine in November 1999*

*And reproduced by kind permission of the author and the Torpedo Club of Gourock.*



# *Those Happiest Of Days!*

*Kentish Independent, 27 June 1974*

(When a pupil had to see the Head if caught without his cap on)

Does anybody Remember Cyril Bull?

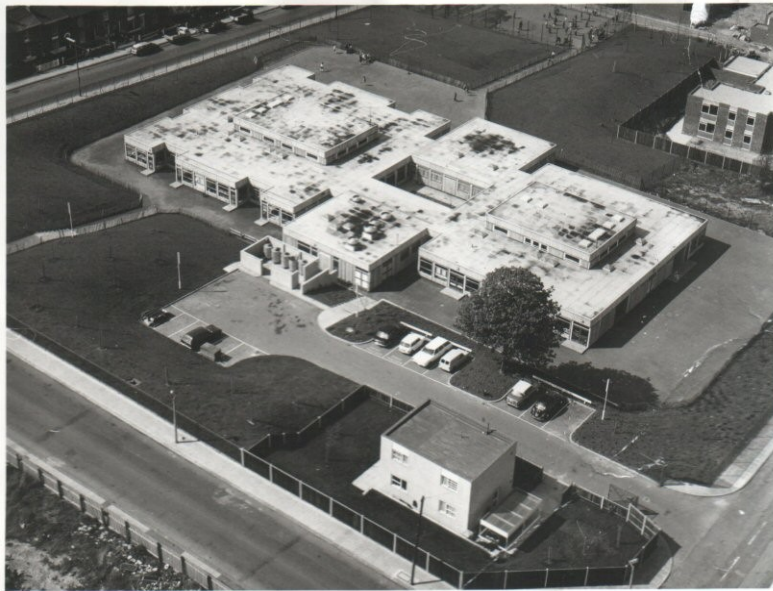


*Foxhill School as an Education Centre. Then awaiting possible demolition.*

*(Possibly now converted into apartment flats)*

*Photo: Kentish Independent.*

The question is prompted by the official opening last Friday of the new Foxfield Primary School in Ragland Road, Plumstead, which now accommodates children from the century-old Foxhill School in Nightingale Vale, now empty and derelict and waiting for the demolition men to move in.



For many years before the war, Mr Bull was Headmaster of Foxhill.

*Foxfield School today, an aerial view 2007. Built in the 1980's, its name may be an amalgamation of Foxhill and Bloomfield Schools. Photo: Clare Crawford.*

And what a fine school Mr Bull made of it!

That was back in the days when the emblem on the

school cap was a black fox on a white background and the boys, aged between seven and eleven, who went there had to answer to him personally if ever they were caught in the streets without those caps on.

It was a different world then. No comprehensive schools. Not even the "eleven plus". Instead, there were scholarships and those who got them were entitled to go to any of the grammar schools in southeast London.

Mr Bull and his tiny staff, it was a tiny school with only five masters, were particularly proud of their scholarship record. Most years they would get half a dozen of the boys through.

And the day after the results had been announced they would all come to school scrubbed and polished and in their best suits, to be sent to Woolwich to have their photos taken.

Mr Bull would pay for the photographs out of his own pocket. From each set of three, costing two shillings, he'd keep one himself and gave his scholarship boys the other two to take home to their parents.

#### FRAMED

Those that he kept he'd have framed and hung in the school corridor. In the end there was row upon row of them, which prompts me to wonder what on earth happened to those photographs now? Indeed, what has happened to the boys? And to the masters?

There was a Mr Woolley, a craggy little man who was always making it clear that he was no relation to the famous Kent cricketer of the same name; and Mr Pritchard, who sported a big moustache; and a Mr Williams, tall, thin and clean-shaven.

In a way, Mr Bull himself was like a bulldog, squarely built with a powerful personality. He wore a spotted bow tie whilst Robin Day was still in short trousers.

#### SHOP

It all seems a long time ago. Most of the old terraced houses where the boys of Foxhill lived have long since been pulled down.

And with them has gone the little shop at the bottom of the hill where they bought half-penny bags of sweets and if they were lucky would find a piece of cardboard in the bag which entitled them to their money back.

Soon, too, will have gone the school playground where the boys exchanged their copies of the Wizard, the Rover and the Hotspur and which still echoes with ghostly shouts of "Six every time you knock it down."

Now Foxhill is just a little old building that has outlived its usefulness. But for several generations of Plumstead schoolboys, it harbours a lot of memories.



*Foxhill School c1950. Photos: Lorna Wilkinson.*



*Foxhill School Football Team. Captain Don Wilkinson.*

# *Those Old School Days*

*John Thompson*



*1960 (?) Timbercroft Primary School class photo.  
John is standing to the left of the teacher. Photo: John Thompson*

I remember being very happy at Timbercroft School.

Embarrassed to say now, my main recollection was being given the cane, along with Paul Waghorn and Adrian Pearson. As I remember, we were only about seven years old at the time. It was done at assembly, in front of the whole school, by Mrs Davies, Headmistress at the time. She announced that it was the first time she had to use the cane in all her years as Headmistress.

It was for spitting on the back of Pat Kinersley's coat whilst walking home. I guess the punishment was correct at the time. In this day and age far worse things happen to seven year olds.

I also remember the whole school playing 'British Bulldog', right across the width of the playground, strange the silly things you remember.

# Tin Checks And 'Divi' Day (c.1943)

Sheila Lee (nee Jordan)

'Divi Day' was one of the year's 'great' occasions when I was a child. In Lakedale Road there were a number of Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society shops, - grocers, furnishing, 'fashion' and shoes – maybe more but the memory grows fainter! The 'Co-op' delivered both our milk and bread. There were bigger 'Co-op' stores in Woolwich, selling furniture, household goods, 'fashion' clothes, and 'book shop' (where I often lingered hoping to add to my Enid Blyton collection!) and a restaurant – white tablecloths and waitresses, which was sometimes



a special treat after Saturday shopping in Woolwich, for afternoon tea.

Every time a purchase was made in any of these shops our mothers' received tin checks to that value. Each coin had a tin equivalent, right down to the last farthing. Spiteful little things they were – thin and worn, with sharp edges. At the end of each year we would have a considerable amount of 'tin checks' amounting sometimes to the equivalent of a carrier bag full.

The Society paid out a 'dividend' once a year and believe me, pennies

(and farthings) counted in those days. All our tin checks were accumulated throughout the year and on the eve of 'Divi Day' we all sat round the kitchen table, as a very extended family, counting them up into little paper bags – I think they were blue!

Off to the Co-op hall in Lakedale Road the following morning, waiting for the 'dividend' to be proclaimed to all – normally brought moans and groans from those hoping for a windfall – it never was! I remember the 'counters' were quite officious and seemed to favour bright red fingernails!

Following lengthy queuing, snaking outside of the hall, down the stairs, and out into Lakedale Road, eventually a collection of tables confronted us, manned by said counters. The queues were lengthy – our mothers' really did know how to queue, of necessity. The counters proceeded to recount the checks in our small bags – a regular 'counting house' – and our mothers received the appropriate dividend return. Recounts were quite often demanded! A pound or so, perhaps, was the dividend reward but nevertheless very welcome.

Curiously this was a major event in the year and caused a great deal of excitement – we were, I think, more easily pleased! – or desperate!! Those Were The Days.

# *Two Drunken Tealeaves*

*Colin Weightman*

There was a very large bombsite situated off Parkdale Road that extended from Parkdale Road through to Lakedale Road. We often played there on our way home from school, sometimes cutting through to the Common via these two large bombsites (probably caused by a stick of bombs or a landmine parachute bomb. These later type used to drift down silently, attached to a parachute and explode above the ground to cause maximum damage and death; they were huge torpedo bombs that took out heaps of houses and other buildings).

What ever happened to the large red brick building situated next to this bombsite on Parkdale? It had its own driveway with two gates. It could well have been part of the old building complex that were once the dreaded 'Relief Offices'.

I had a real good mate Brian Lynch who used to live in this big house. It had been made into flats sometime after the war, I think it might have been used to house folk who'd been bombed out. Brian lived in one of them with his family who were quite poor folk. My mum took a shine to my school mate. He was under-developed and quite small for his age, which was fairly common in those days. Mum gave his mum some of my old clothes. I thought it odd, in my childish mind, that, on our way to school together, he was wearing my old jacket or raincoat etc.

I do remember though, how, one day on our way home from school, Brian invited me into his home. His parents were out; inside his home was very sparse but very clean and tidy and smelt strongly of pine disinfectant. He showed me where his dad kept his bottles of stout.. Well that was a big mistake; the next thing he had opened a bottle! And out of sheer devilment, we began drinking the pint of stout.

Surprisingly it tasted very nice, too nice, and so we finished it all up! We then ran giggling up the hill to my house, laughing our silly young (tipsy) heads off.

My mum said, quite innocently, "What's got into you silly buggers? Anyone would think you'd both been drinking!" With that we took off, beery breaths an' all, down to the safety of the 'oller, where we lay hidden in the bracken, laughing and giggling till the sun went down. Two young drunken tealeaves! \*

*\*Tealeaf is cockney rhyming slang for Thief. (Tea leaves = Thieves)*



*Early style newspaper heading from 1936.*

# *Two Reminiscences*

*Kes Grant, born 1965*

As children, we knew the Slade Ravine as Dragon's Dell. I was a bit of an urchin and on one occasion crawled along the inflow pipe with a young boy. He turned back after a bit but I continued on as far as the pedestrian crossing at Greenslade School, where the pipe splits and there's a ladder to the drain cover. My sister and friends tried to pull the cover up to let me out, while I pushed from the inside. But they dropped it, nearly severing my sister's finger. I had to crawl all the way back again on all fours. It was pitch dark, with only glints from the rats' eyes lighting the way. My sister and I told our parents that she had slipped on glass.

*Fred Strong, born 1929*

The evening of May 8th 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, Eddison 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 to save him, in his Sunday suit, which caused great distress

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.

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

# *V1 Flying Bomb Fi-103/V-1 "Buzz Bomb"*

**Type:** Air-To-Surface/Surface-To-Surface Missile

**Engine:**

Argus 109-014 Pulsejet impulse duct

Thrust: 660lb

**Dimensions:**

(300 kg)

Span: 18 ft. 9 in. (5.715m)

Length: 26 ft. 3 in. (6.00m)

Body Diameter: 33.0 in. (838mm)

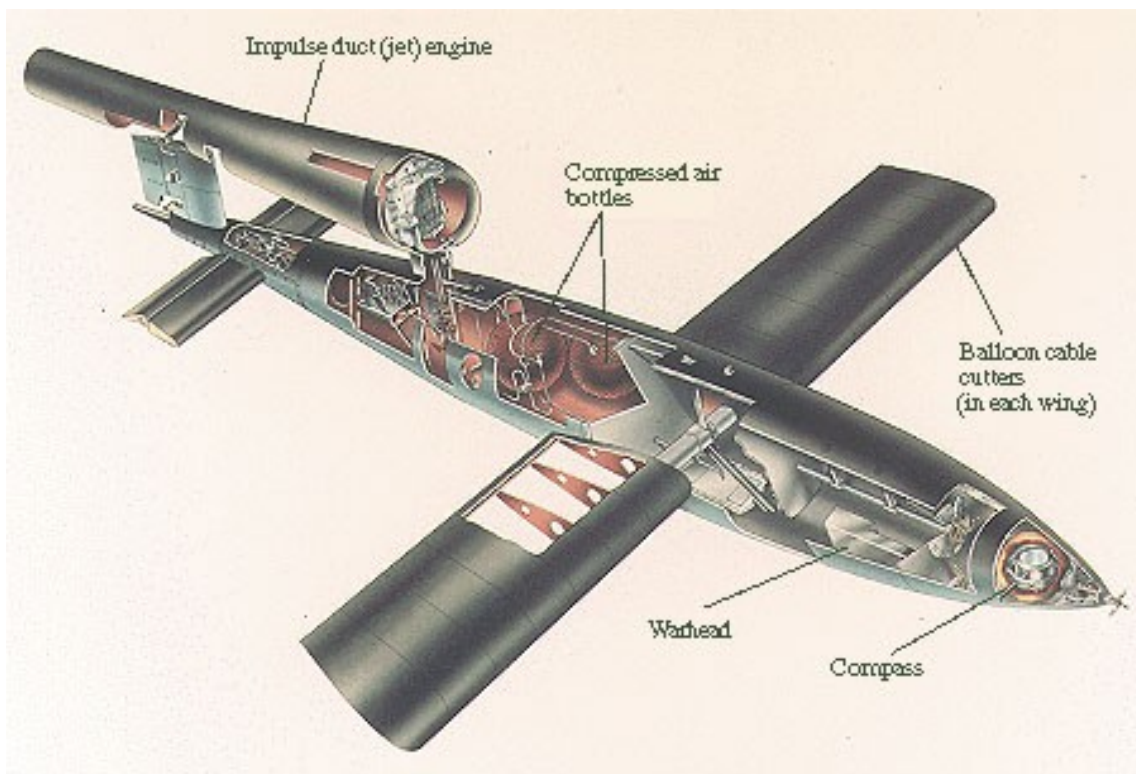
**Weight:** 4,960 lb. (2250 kg)

**Performance:**

Maximum Speed: 400 mph (645km/h)

Target Approach: 497 mph (800km/h)

Range from launch at 8,200 ft. (2500m): about 205 miles (330km)



*Thanks to the Wikipedia for this information and diagram.*

## V2 Rockets

<b>Period of Production</b>	<b>Production</b>
Up to 15 Sep 1944	19001
15 Sep to 29 Oct 1944	900
29 Oct to 24 Nov 1944	600
24 Nov to 15 Jan 1945	1100
15 Jan to 15 Feb 1945	700
Total	5200

Towed to the launch site. There it was erected onto the launch table, fuelled, armed, gyros were set and the rocket was fired. From arrival at a site to firing took about 90 minutes. The crew could leave the firing site within 30 minutes.

This was very successful, and an average of ten V-2s were launched per day, by far the largest rockets of a single type. After the war, estimates showed that up to 100 V-2s could be launched per day with these trailers, given sufficient supply of the rockets.

The missile could be launched practically anywhere, roads running through forests being a particular favourite. The system was so mobile and small that not one Meillerwagen was caught in action by Allied aircraft.

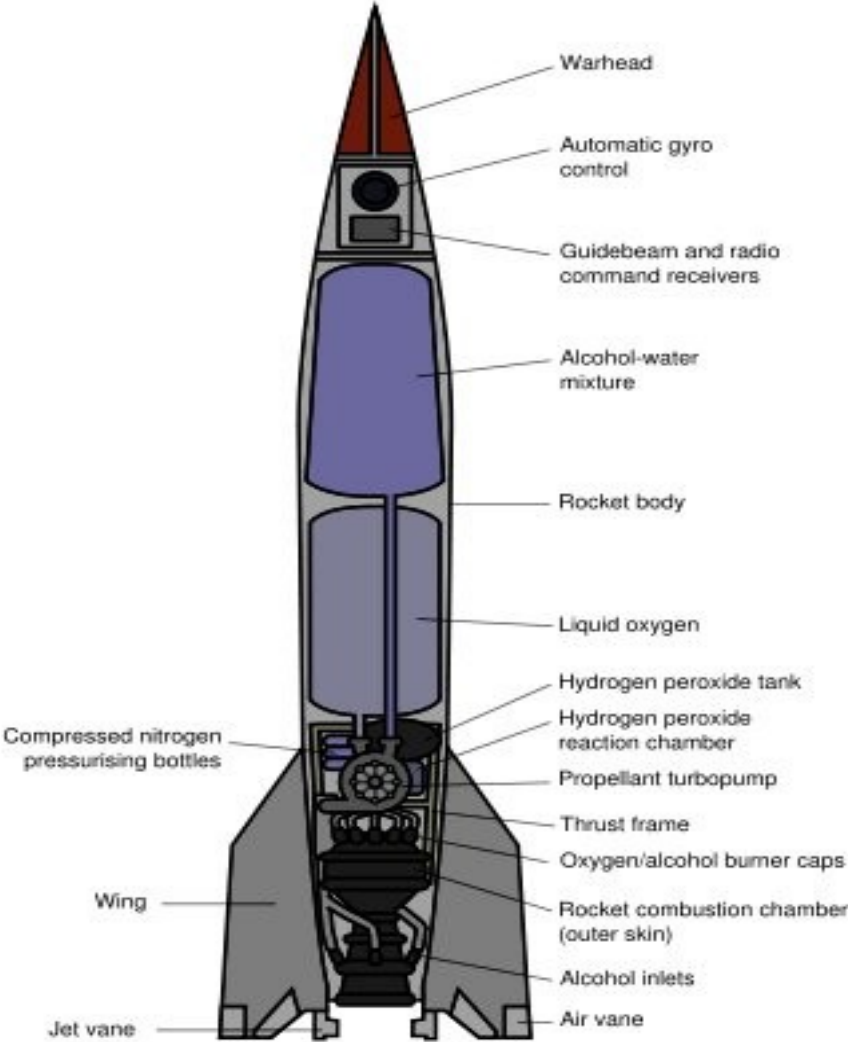
The first was a launch on June 13th, 1944.

The final two exploded on (or near) their targets on 27th March 1945. The last British civilian killed was Mrs Ivy Millichamp, 34, in her home in Elm Grove, Orpington. An estimated 2,754 civilians were killed in London by V-2 attacks with another 6,523 injured [20], which is just two people killed per V-2 rocket. However, this understates the potential of the V-2, since many rockets were miss-directed and exploded harmlessly. Accuracy increased greatly over the course of the war, particularly on batteries where Leitstrahl-Guide Beam apparatus was installed, with V-2s sometimes landing within meters of the target. Accurately targeted missiles were often devastating, causing large numbers of deaths—about 160 in one explosion in a Woolworth's department store in New Cross south-east London and 567 deaths in a cinema in Antwerp and significant damage in the critically important Antwerp docks.

To a civilian population inured to the idea that they might soon be blown up if they heard an enemy bomber or because the V-2 travelled supersonically, it reached its target in silence, with a tell-tale fading whistling sound heard only after the explosion.

However, it also meant that when the attacks on London began in September 1944, the British government could keep them secret. Explosions could be attributed to other causes or to no particular cause. In this way the Germans were unable to be sure that their weapons were reaching England. The Germans themselves finally announced the V-2 on 8th November and only then, on 10th November 1944 did Winston Churchill inform Parliament,

and the world, that England had been under rocket attack "for the last few weeks".



Thanks for all this information to: [Http//en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)

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# VE Day

By Helena Noifeld of BBC Radio Kent  
*on behalf of Thelma Barnett.*

We lived in Plumstead in South East London. Mother and I were the only two at home. The end of the war was to be announced at The Palace.

We decided to go to the West End. The train was packed with happy people. We arrived at Waterloo Station in the morning. We walked over Westminster Bridge, past Big Ben and Parliament, along The Strand and past Downing Street; on through Trafalgar Square, up The Mall to Buckingham Palace and stood on the steps of the Victoria Monument.

We had a good vantage point and the crowds were huge. We joined in the singing and chanting for the King and Queen. They duly came to the balcony with Mr Churchill and the two princesses. Elizabeth was in the uniform of the 'ATS'.

The cheering was great; everybody surged forward to the Palace railings. Mr Churchill spoke to us, announcing the end of the war. The Royal Family waved then went inside. After returning to wave again and again, everyone was very happy.

We had a lovely day. In the evening we decided to go home, wandering back to Waterloo Station only to find the last train had gone, as most transport did not run during the night. However, we set off to walk home. It was a very long way and as we lived in Plumstead, we got home in the small hours, very, very tired but happy.

I will never forget "VE Day".

*'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)'*



# *Wildlife Observations*

*Mark Angliss*

Plumstead and Winn's Commons, July-October 1999

Abbreviations: PC = Plumstead Common, WC = Winn's Common,

BHL = Bleak Hill Lane.

BIRDS (Total species: 47)

Cormorant: Occasionally seen flying over the Common.

Grey Heron: Occasionally seen flying over the Common.

Canada Goose: A flock of about a dozen, seen from Plumstead Council Yard, flying east above Shrewsbury Park, mid-August.

Mallard: A pair on Slade Ponds in mid-August and a male there twice in late September.

Sparrowhawk: July-August: Newly fledged birds in Bleak Hill woods, calling frequently; on one occasion, the female parent was seen to bring food, dropping it from a height for a young bird to catch. August onwards: Individual birds regularly around BHL, occasionally elsewhere.

Kestrel: One or two birds occasionally seen on the Common or nearby.

Moorhen: One on Slade Pond, Oct. 28.

Black-Headed Gull: Present in small numbers July-August; numbers on WC playing field increasing from early September.

Herring Gull: A few individuals sometimes seen with Black-headed gulls on WC. Up to a dozen in October.

Great Black-Backed Gull: Two juveniles present at WC playing fields, mid-Oct.

Lesser Black-Backed Gull: Two or three adult birds with Herring gulls on WC playing fields, mid-Oct.

Feral Pigeon: Abundant.

Woodpigeon: Abundant.

Collared Dove: A pair regularly around Lakedale Road area, occasionally elsewhere.

Swift: Abundant over the Common in July-early August.

Green Woodpecker: Seen almost daily, visibly and vocally conspicuous. Two fledglings spent much of July in the Slade Ravine, on one occasion seen bathing in Slade Ponds. From September, birds seen most frequently around BHL, but can turn up on almost any tree on the Common.

Great-Spotted Woodpecker: Regular around BHL, occasional elsewhere. More often heard than seen.

Skylark: One passed over BHL, Oct. 25; four over WC playing field, Oct 29.

Swallow: Not seen until late September. From September 28 to October 3 many birds, with a few House Martins, seen feeding or passing over WC, some over PC. All disappeared when the weather turned cold. A few seen over WC on Oct. 8.

House Martin: Local breeding birds frequent over PC and WC through summer. Not seen after Oct 3.

Meadow Pipit: Only one bird seen so far, Sept 28, WC playing field.

Pied Wagtail: Occasionally seen on PC and WC in September, almost daily from mid-Oct.

Grey Wagtail: One seen over Slade Ponds mid-August, one or two seen in that area on several occasions from mid-September through October.

Dunnock (Hedge Sparrow): Abundant.

Sedge Warbler: A male heard singing from Slade Ponds, mid-August.

Whitethroat: Present, July-August.

Blackcap: Present, July-August.

Chiffchaff: Present, July-September.

Goldcrest: Not seen until October. One bird near BHL, Oct 8. Up to three birds regularly in that area from mid-Oct.

Spotted flycatcher: Two or three birds seen by Slade Ponds one morning, mid-September.

Wheatear: A female present on WC playing field one afternoon in mid-August. A second female in same area, Sept 28.

Blackbird: Abundant.

Song Thrush: Present.

Mistle Thrush: Present.

Fieldfare: First birds of the winter; two at BHL, Oct 10. One seen over BHL, Oct 25.

Long-Tailed Tit: Seen almost daily. Particularly in Slade Ravine and around BHL, but often elsewhere.

Great Tit: Abundant.

Blue Tit: Abundant.

Wren: Abundant.

Greenfinch: Present.

Chaffinch: Present.

Goldfinch: Not seen until October (probably overlooked). Three birds present in the Slade Ravine, Oct. 8. Small numbers regularly around BHL and Blendon Terrace area from mid-Oct.

House Sparrow: Abundant.

Starling: Abundant.

Jay: Abundant.

Magpie: Abundant.

Carrion Crow: Abundant.

#### BUTTERFLIES

Grassland species (Ringlet, Meadow Brown) abundant around the perimeter of WC. Small Copper and Common Blue seen near BHL. Speckled Wood common near BHL and occasional elsewhere. Also seen: Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma Green-Veined White.

A few Red Admirals still flying through October. A Green-Veined White flying near the Slade Ravine, Nov. 2..

#### MOTHS

A very bedraggled Hawkmoth found resting on a tree near St Mark's Church Hall, mid-August.

#### DRAGONFLIES

Impressive numbers around the Common from July to early September, particularly in the Slade Ravine and BHL areas. Three or four species involved, but only Emperor identified. Most disappeared after the cold weather at the end of September, but a few small dragonflies flying around Slade Pond on fine days well into October.

#### AMPHIBIA

Common Frog: July-August; well-grown adults seen around Slade Ponds, but also some very small immature individuals, which suggests a surprisingly late spawning season.

#### MAMMALS

Bats: August 28, about a dozen large bats (probably Noctule) feeding over the Slade Ravine about 20 minutes before sunset.

Grey Squirrel: Plentiful in Slade Ravine and around BHL; frequent elsewhere.

Fox: Present on the Common, but no sightings except for a road-kill vixen on Lakedale Road, mid-September.

#### PLANTS

Despite large areas of unimproved grassland around the perimeter of Winn's Common, the grassland flora seems surprisingly poor. Small colonies of Deptford Pink (under gorse bushes by Grosmont Road). Field Pansy (WC football pavilion) and Common Toadflax (BHL) are therefore worthy of note.

In respect of grassland ecology, the presence of Lucerne in the Slade Ravine is potentially a cause for concern; and in respect of woodland ecology, colonies of Japanese Knotweed at St John's Terrace and Grosmont Road are regrettable, but not surprising.

## FUNGI

At least a dozen species of fungi observed on the Common, but only Field Mushroom, Shaggy Inkcap and Fly Agaric (in the Slade Ravine) identified.

### **More wildlife Observations**

Mark Angliss

Plumstead/Winn's Commons Oct. 1999 to March 2000.

### **Winter Visitors**

A very mild winter, with only brief spells of frost in mid-November and late December, and this probably explains the disappointingly low numbers of winter-visiting birds on the Common. The two Fieldfares at Bleak Hill in early October, and another small group there at the end of November, were the only sightings of this species. A number of Redwings were round the west end of Plumstead Common from just before Christmas until early January, with occasional birds there up to the end of February. A prolonged spell of frost or snow would undoubtedly have brought greater numbers of these two common winter visitors to the Common, but their poor showing may also reflect a lack of berry-bearing shrubs in the area.

Up to three Goldcrests were present on Bleak Hill, and half-a-dozen Pied Wagtails were scattered around the Common through the winter. One or two Grey Wagtails were regularly around the Slade Ravine until Christmas, but only occasionally afterwards.

On the plus side, a flock of about twenty Lesser Redpolls were flitting about the treetops on Bleak Hill at the end of January, with single birds there in February and early March, and 3 pairs of Mallard and a Moorhen arrived on the Slade Ponds at the end of October. One pair of Mallard soon moved on, but two pairs stayed for the winter and appear to have established territories. The Moorhen was also soon joined by another bird, and they too have remained. The prospects of breeding look hopeful for both species.

Two mallard drakes visited the Ponds for a few days at the end of February, and a pair of Canada Geese arrived on Feb. 29 but did not stay long.

Away from the Common, a Blackcap was in full song in a garden on Genesta Road on Feb.12. These migratory warblers are common summer visitors to Britain, and in recent years small numbers (probably from the Scandinavian breeding population) have started to winter in southern England. This sighting of wintering Blackcap is a personal first. A second bird was singing in the Slade Ravine on March 13. This may have been a wintering bird, or an early returnee.

### **Residents**

Blue, Great and Long-Tailed Tits were plentiful and active through the season. A pair of Coal Tits at Bowman's Hollow, above Wickham Lane, were a welcome but not unexpected addition to the species list. Great Spotted Woodpeckers were regular at Blendon Terrace and

Bleak Hill, and drumming was heard at both sites from mid-February onwards. The Green Woodpeckers more or less disappeared for the winter, but returned to Bleak Hill by the end of February.

Individual Kestrels and Sparrowhawks occasionally seen through the winter (see below). Occasional sightings of Fox on or near the Common.

### **Absentees**

I have been surprised by the absence of a number of species, whether resident or migratory, from the Common. The number and variety of finches (Lesser Redpolls aside) seems particularly low. Although two or three small flocks of Goldfinch could often be found feeding on Burdock through the winter, both Chaffinch and Greenfinch numbers seemed lower than I would have expected, and I have yet to see either Bullfinch or Linnet. Bullfinches, while not uncommon, are very patchy in their distribution and can easily be overlooked, but the absence of Linnets is quite surprising. They are particularly associated with gorse, and I would have expected the Common to hold at least a few over the winter, if not a small breeding population. I expect their absence is due to a combination of disturbance, lack of food plants and a national decline in their population.

More surprising still is the apparent absence of both Tree creeper and Nuthatch. Both species are relatively common woodland birds and are easy to find when present, and much of the woodland on the Common seems suitable for their needs, but I have yet to record either bird.

Total of species seen on Plumstead/Winn's Common: 52.

### **First Signs of Spring**

Great Tits in full song by mid-January.

Jan. 24 – Male Sparrowhawk nest-building. Bleak Hill woods. Nest building has continued, and both male and female are now regularly in the area.

Jan. 28 – A pair of Kestrels prospecting for nest sites around the roof tops of house at the top of Tormount Road (apparently unsuccessfully, as they have not stayed). Goldcrest singing from conifers near PC Adventure Playground.

Feb. 12 – The first butterfly of the Millennium was a wind-swept Red Admiral near WC football pavilion (probably disturbed from hibernation rather than naturally emerging).

March 10 – Red Admiral at Bleak Hill.

March 10/11 – Frogs spawning in middle pool of Slade Ponds.

March 12 – Small Tortoiseshell at the Slade Ravine.

March 13 – First Chiffchaff of the year singing at Bleak Hill, Comma Butterfly at the Slade Ravine, and Frogs spawning in lower pool of the Ponds.

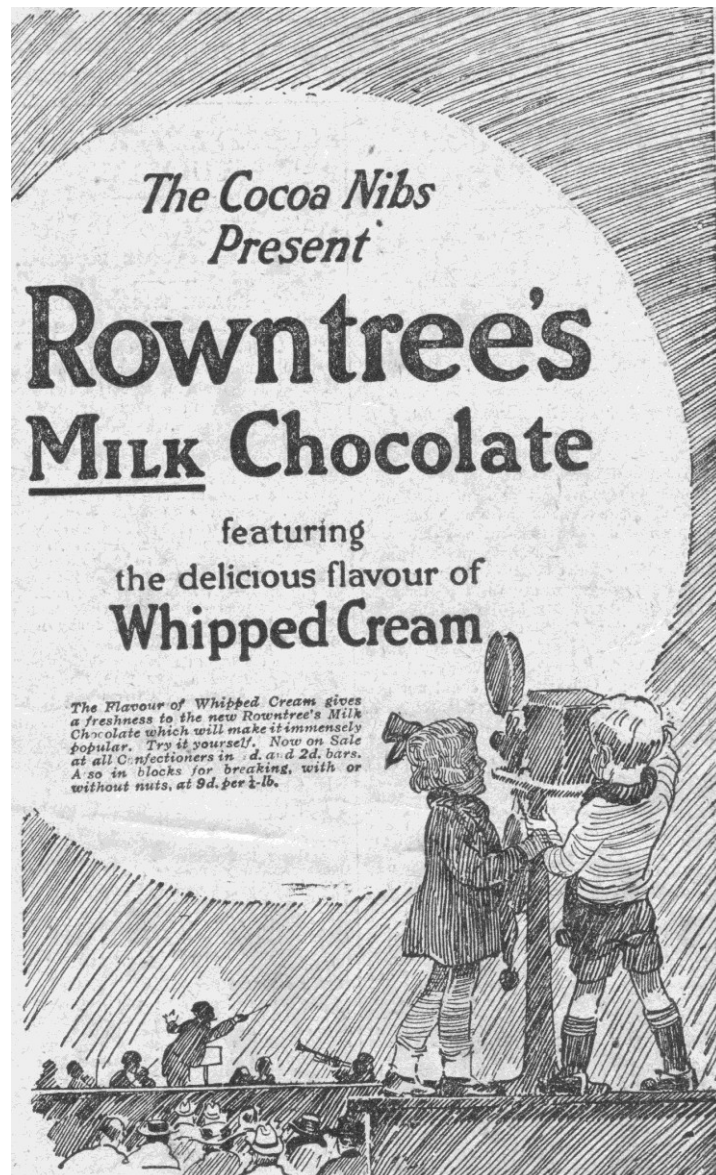
March 19 – Two more Chiffchaffs and a Comma at Bleak Hill.

## Butterflies '99

The last butterfly of 1999 was a Red Admiral fluttering round the Council Yard on Nov.27.

Local resident, and member of Plumstead Common Environment Group, Monica Meenehan, has kindly let me have her records of butterflies in her garden on St Margaret's Grove, mostly from early 1999. These add Brimstone, Holly Blue, Wall Brown, Orange Tip, Gatekeeper and Small White to the list, bringing the total to 15 species on or near the Common – quite a respectable tally for an urban area.

*Thanks to the Plumstead Common Environment Group and Mark Angliss for their kind donation of this very interesting wildlife information.*



# *Wildlife Stories*

*June Clark,*

**A former Plumstead resident now living in New York**

I wanted you to know of some I can remember. My mother was never a keen gardener, unlike dad and me. So after he passed away in 1983, the garden was left alone, but for weeding and intermittent mowing. It seems just a few years later, a fox moved into the garden, so my mother began feeding it table scraps and leaving water for it in an old saucepan. Quite undisturbed, he made himself at home on the compost heap at the bottom of the garden against the wall and next to the old bird shed (where my father kept canaries) and the fence. Vines from a Macoma Road garden had formed a little roof and it was quite a cosy spot for him to nap. One day, with the back door open, my mother walked into the living room to find the fox quite at home on the hearth mat! After a few years, my mother gave up the mowing and the fox then dug a den in the garden, under the lawn and small flowerbed, close to the bird shed. Then in the spring of 2000, three cubs were born and lived the summer there, the independent cubs leaving in the autumn. When my mother died in that November, the fox was still living on the compost pile. Of course, there is no way of knowing how many times the ownership changed, but it was certainly a favourite spot, with my mother and carers continuing to leave table scraps for the foxes. My mother, of course, never had mice! I often caught the fox sunbathing on the freshly cut lawn or later in the tall grass when I was home, though he would scamper to the security of the compost pile at the sight of me. I did take some photos, not very good, as I don't have a professional camera. I also videotaped the foxes that venture down Tuam Road to check out the pickings at the wheelie bins and plastic bags to be collected the following morning. I was sure to be woken by their fighting over the food. There was always a dominant one. I have seen as many as four and five at a time, never alone.

When my mother passed away, in preparation for the house to be let, I had to remove the old bird shed and spread the compost on the flowerbeds. It was December and cold. Close to the bottom I turned out a huge toad that was hibernating in the wet soggy mess, quite at home. After a while he jumped off to another cold corner and I am sure he found somewhere to sleep the winter out. I cursed the tenants that were to be, for I wanted to keep the foxes and toad in the garden. The slug population was quite minimal and now I knew why. Mum and I had seen this same toad several times during heavy rains. One evening in a downpour I opened the back door to go out to the outside toilet (our only one then) and the light from the house caught his eyes. He continued to sit there enjoying the soaking. I'm not sure if this was the same one I saw one day in Lenton Path, also on a very rainy night around the same time (2000). The one in Lenton Path did look smaller than my toad, which seemed to be rather large at about 5-6 inches long.

Numerous times I have sat on Plumstead Common by the 53 bus terminal by Plumstead Manor School and watched two or three bats busily eating their evening meal. I never

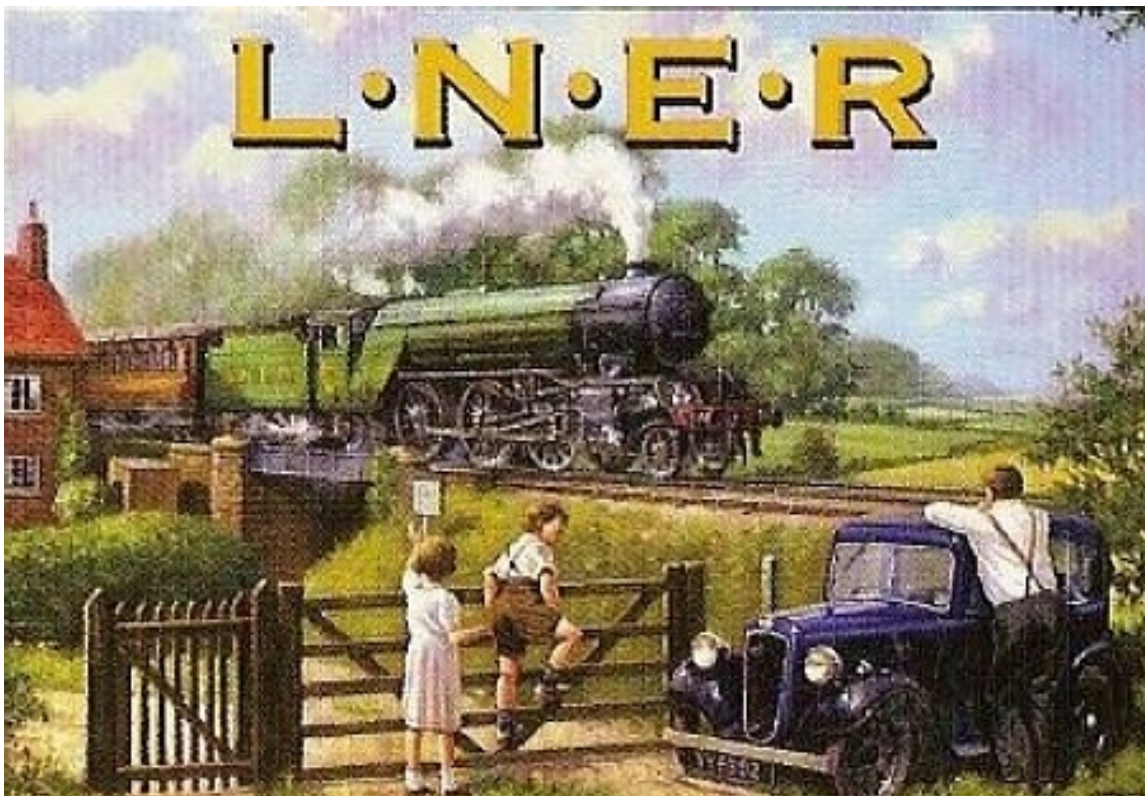
remember such a thing from my earlier years.

Times certainly have changed. I remember well the red squirrels in Shrewsbury Park. It was a thrill then to see a magpie and jackdaw, which are now so common in our gardens and on the street. I still marvel at that. It seemed one year I went home to visit and there they were. I couldn't believe my eyes. I frequently used to go bird watching in the Park and saw many wrens, tits and blackbirds. My mother screamed at me once when I came home from a bird watching expedition, with a dead hedgehog. I couldn't just leave him to rot in the woods, so he was buried (fleas and all) in 97's garden. I also used to find dead jays, sparrows and pigeons, all buried in the garden. I even buried a dead butterfly in a matchbox and made a little cross with matchsticks to mark the site. The woods were then full of birds nesting and I would spend hours crouching under small bushes watching their coming and going.

So it certainly proves that an undisturbed area, such as my mother's garden, will become home to various wildlife in its own time. Unlike us, they prefer a less tamed environment, so a little messy corner can be very welcoming to a few interesting and worthwhile guests.

If I spent more time there, I'm sure I could record interesting bird sightings. I do remember a heron of some kind flying overhead while I was working in the garden that winter. On previous visits I have recorded dawn bird songs, by hanging out the back bathroom window holding a tape recorder! Now I can listen to the birds at Tuam Road while in my little NYC apartment. Nothing quite like it."

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



# *Winnie's Jim Crows*

*Peter Walder*

September 7th -15th, 1940, Plumstead.

Once the Blitz had begun people had to seek the safety of the public shelters during an air raid and there were several raids each day. Lives were greatly disrupted, so a scheme was started by the Daily Sketch to use the children, who weren't at school, to look out for approaching enemy aircraft. Children of varying ages took part. I was nine years old. (School was cancelled in London). We were issued with leaflets which contained silhouettes of the enemy aircraft and I became good at identifying the German planes.

Our house was a two-story house with a skylight looking over the rooftops. I could see all the way down the Thames from Plumstead to the Ford Motor plant with its big chimneys.

My dad worked at Woolwich Arsenal in the 'Danger Buildings', which were full of explosives. It was dangerous even in peacetime. I had a ladder leading up to the skylight where I kept watch. The enemy planes always came up the river from east to west. Granddad lent me his old binoculars and my father, who was a sergeant in the Home Guard, lent me a tin hat. Granddad also found me a 4.7 inch anti-aircraft shell case and dad made me a wooden tripod to hang it on.

I then had a long metal rod, which I placed inside the shell case and when I spotted enemy aircraft I rang it like a bell. It made a very loud noise, which made me quite deaf!

All the people in the street would seek refuge in their Anderson shelters in their gardens. This meant they didn't have to stay in their garden shelters for the whole of the raid or go to the public shelters.

I felt very important in my tin hat, binoculars and bell. Once I had rung the bell I had to rush down to the Anderson shelter from three flights up. I was allowed to slide down the banisters of two flights then jump the last six steps. Mum put a mat at the bottom of the stairs and a mattress from one of the camp beds on the floor in front of the open Anderson door so I could throw myself onto it. Once in, she shut the door with a bang. The neighbours fully approved of what I did.

In Parliament, Winston Churchill (our revered Prime Minister) said, "Our country will not be bowed by these terror raids. My young 'Jim Crows' are looking out for enemy aircraft so that the population can carry on working and they will be known as 'Winnie's Jim Crows'."

The Daily Sketch encouraged mums to make armbands with the initials W.J.C. on them for the participating children. The paper also did an article every week about the W.J.C.s. My friend Johnny and I had our photos taken in the roof.

I only did this for two weeks as I was then evacuated to Cornwall, but that's another story related in my book, "One Boy's War", by Peter Walder. ISBN 1900511673.

*'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)'*

# *Woolwich Arsenal Days And Bullets*

*Colin Weightman*

I well remember the constant rat-a-tat tatting sounds of machine gun fire... and the boom!... boom!...the sound of big heavy guns being tested, fired into the large sand banks with red warning flags fluttering on poles, even though it was a long way off we could see all this activity from our house, safely perched high up in Sladedale Road.

I remember the big silver grey barrage balloon that used to float, tethered in the Arsenal grounds. We were told that they were used as target practice. I remember the Meteor planes, fast twin fuselage jets, flying and firing their machine guns (blanks of course!) at targets that trailed far behind Tiger Moth planes that would tow them through the skies above us in the Plumstead Common areas not long after WWII. (I wonder where the spent empty cartridges fell?)

As kids we went on trips along the sewage embankment that skirted the length of the Woolwich Arsenal's fence. This fence was very tall as it had to keep out any enemy who were intent on spying and sabotage and what have you and was electrified during the war period and still carried the old warning notices, positioned at intervals all along the fence. Along the top were rows of barbed wire.

I well remember one outing when me and me mates got through this fence, which was falling into disrepair after the war. We explored this big old building in there. It was quite run down, as was everything else around us in there. In this huge derelict building coloured crape paper streamers were fluttering in the wind blowing through the broken windows and a large notice announcing to the resident ghosts, 'A Very Happy Christmas 1946', still there in 1954-5 after that distant party.

As we walked along the sewer bank you could see lots of old collections of things from the war years, such as I recall some old horse drawn ambulance carriages that must have been from the WWI era. They were in a poor state and still had a painted red cross on their sides.

We found lots of spent shells whilst looking around inside the Arsenal. Much was thrown at this big, strategically very important, target during the war, consequently there was much to be found and picked up by us kids. We found lots of spent bullets and empty cartridge cases. We'd often go back to look for more. We all had tobacco tins full with our prized collections of shells. The bullets that we found were in different sizes and shapes, from cannon, fired from German and British planes, to .303 to dum dum bullets, around 8mm or so.

We were told as kids that the dum dum bullets were illegal to use as they were designed to spread out on impact and cause horrible gaping wounds! This was exciting morbid stuff to us kids and these were especially sought after. (I later found out that these particular bullets were legal, but sometimes were cut across the snubbed point with a deep crosscut. This would cause the bullet to spread out on impact and this was illegal to do). We even found the occasional live bullet, the cartridge case still attached and its base being unmarked from the impact of the firing pin, which indicated to us that it hadn't been fired. It was our thing as kids to take all these treasures to school. To show, compare and to swap with other kids

who also had collections. However, once the 'powers that were' found out about these "dangerous things" that we were bringing into the school, they banned them from the school. I wonder why...?

**MOTOR & MOTOR CYCLE MART**

**TRADE BARGAINS** **5s. per line**

**B**ENTLEY 3-litre 2 carb Vanden Plus Spts 4-str, blns, tx, £38. 243 Maids Vale, Kilburn, W.9.

**COMMERCIAL VEHICLES** **5s. per line**

**£35** FORD 6 wheel truck, good running order, Phone Amherst 2523.

**1934** RALEIGH Light Van, in good condition, price £25. Mayfield Laundry, Gillespie-road, N.5. Can 1177.

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**A** 1929 MORRIS 8 h.p Saloon, 3 new tyres, good oil pressure £20. (Sunday morning.) 166a Warwick-ld S.W.5.

**M**MORRIS-Cowley 2-str. new hood and side curtains paint excellent, tyres very good, any trial, £11. Phone Wim 2733.

**£40!** 1925 BENTLEY 3-litre, 100 m.p.h., special chassis, c.b. foursome coupe, brought up to 1930 specifications. Finchley 5259.

**'32** 34-h.p. DELAGE limousine, face forward occasional, £95. 22 Sussex-mews, Regent's Park, N.W.1 (Pad. 7836).

**1933** AUSTIN 10 sun saloon, £65 or offer. 161a Tanfield-avenue, N.W.2.

**1934** SINGER 9 sports 4-seater, 1 owner, £90 or offer. Reed, Shep. 2070.

**1934** AUSTIN 12.6 drophead coupe, special body, low mileage excellent condition, £95 or near offer. Phone Bowes Pk 1989.

**1934** FORD "8" sun Sal, leather uphol, £50. Brooklan Cafe, 127 Eastern-ave, Ilford. Val 4034.

M.-COWLEY sln, 4-dr, txd, £7 10s. Ham 6033.

'29 WOLSELEY sal, ins, barg, £17. Ful 6953.

# *Woolwich Childhood*

*Wynne Handley (nee Winnie English)*

Overall mine was a largely uneventful but a happy childhood. An only child, I was born in Lewisham Hospital in 1951 and lived in Armstrong Place from birth until the house was compulsorily purchased as part of the area regeneration process in 1960.



*Wynne Handley (nee Winifred English) at 18 months old.*

Ours was a terrace house purchased by my father when he left the Royal Artillery in the late 1940's. Upstairs there were three bedrooms, all with open fireplaces. Fires were only ever lit as a very special treat when the occupant of the bedroom was ill and confined to bed. Another treat when ill as a child was a bowl full of white bread pieces sprinkled with sugar and soaked in warm milk. But mostly the bedrooms remained unheated and the windows on cold winter mornings would be covered in marvellous opaque patterns formed by the frosty ice crystals. The floors throughout the house were covered in linoleum.

Downstairs was a parlour that was kept as the best room and very rarely used. I only recall sitting in there at Christmas. In the parlour was an upright piano. There was also a heavily padded sofa and two armchairs, which had been purchased from Hanley's the second hand furniture shop nearby. The sofa was so big it couldn't fit through the front door and had to be carried in through the window. Unlike most of our neighbours we did have electric lights; the other houses were gas lit. Mostly we lived in the sitting room at the back of the house and the kitchen cum scullery. The toilet was outside and we used squares of old newspaper as toilet paper. In the scullery was a coal fired copper boiler that had to be filled with buckets of cold water from the tap in the kitchen sink in order to heat water. Our bath was a 'Bungalow bath', which was a large tin bath in the kitchen covered by a lift up working surface when not in use.

Water from the copper had to be ladled by my father into and out of the bath, an event that took place each Sunday with all three of us using the same water and washing our hair with

Lifebuoy soap.

The washing of clothes was done by hand with the aid of a washboard and a mangle in the yard used to wring out the water. Sheets and pillowcases were sent to a laundry and returned tied into a bundle with string. Strips of flypaper hung under the light bulbs captured flies on the sticky surface and jars with small amounts of jam and water attracted and captured troublesome wasps. We bought Robinson's jams so I could collect the golliwog stickers to claim enamelled golliwog badges.



My father worked as a cable machinist at Harvey's. They threw wonderful Christmas parties for the children of the workers. Father supplemented his pay and helped to keep us well fed by breeding rabbits in stacks of hutches in the back garden. These we ate and sold to neighbours for making rabbit stew. He also kept chickens, which again were used for their meat and eggs for eating and for sale.

The rats this livestock attracted were kept down by a mongrel dog we called Spiv. She was a little mongrel stray who my father had found scavenging around Beresford Market. Her name came from the name Spiv (a police term for 'suspected person involved in vice') a name that was given to men typically involved in things during the war known as the black market. Spiv was a character type immortalised in the television programme Dad's Army as portrayed by Private Walker played by James Beck. Anyway Spiv our dog of uncertain origins and uncertain age changed from living on what she could to becoming a lovable family pet. She had several litters of pups and died of old age in the early 1960s. Spiv however had another side to her nature and was a gallant and brave rat chaser and catcher. When we lived in Woolwich she and my father were frequently requested by neighbours to catch rats, especially those who set up home in the outside lavatories!

I did not belong to any clubs like the Brownies; I felt no need to do so. My days were filled, when not at school, playing in the street with all the other children. We played hockey with upturned walking sticks, Knock Down Ginger (knocking doors and running away to hide and roar with laughter when the occupier came to answer the door and look all around for the culprit). 'He', a game of tag where when you wanted to call a truce you crossed your fingers and called out "Fainights". Hop scotch, with squares chalked on the pavement and a piece of slate, cricket with the wicket chalked on a convenient wall, a game of 'statues' or just kicking a ball about.

There was a corner shop where I would buy loose sweets, poured or picked out from jars, weighed out in 2oz bags of sweets. My favourites were shaped like peas, potatoes and sausages, which I played with my dolls using my tea set. The shop also sold comics. At first I read Chicks Own, later progressing to Harold Hare and later to Bunty and Judy. Bunty and Judy had cut out paper dolls and clothes and I spent ours playing with these and making more clothes for the dolls. I was also an avid reader of Enid Blyton books.

Saturdays we went to Saturday morning pictures, picking up a bag of broken biscuits from Woolworth's on the way to eat during the show. One day outside the pictures there was a

splendidly dressed cowboy on a horse. We all believed he was Roy Rogers and Trigger; it was magical. We did not have a television but we did have a wind up gramophone and played 78's on it. We also had a wireless and tuned in to the BBC Light and the Home programmes. My favourite programmes were Educating Archie (this incredibly was a ventriloquist dummy called Archie Andrews), the Clitheroe Kid and Billy Cotton's Band Show.

Each morning I had to have a desert spoon of malt and cod liver oil, 'to build me up' and on school days I would walk round to Maxey Road to meet my three cousins and we would walk together to Earl Rise School.

Doing this in thick fog (The London Smogs) was wonderfully exciting. My uncle Jim, a former boxer, ran a taxi business from the house in Maxey Road and was the only person I knew who owned a car; they also had a television which was a large box with about an 8 inch screen with a large magnifying screen in front.



*Me with my two cousins and uncle Jim's taxi car.*

According to the two school reports I still have I was in class 1A in 1959 and class 4 in 1960 and the Head teacher was Mr Taylor.

At some point in my education we were taken to the local swimming baths where I was pushed in the deep end by one of the boys in the class. I nearly drowned in the incident and to this day I cannot swim as I have panic attacks if water is splashed in my face.



*Wynne (nee Winifred English) Earl Rise  
1959 approx.*

When my mother took me shopping we would pass a fish shop with a tray of live eels in the window and I would watch them slithering up the glass; the butcher's shop had sawdust on the floor and a monkey in a cage, which of course made it the butcher of choice for children, though my mother always maintained that it was the most expensive butcher. Vegetables and fresh fish were bought from Beresford Square Market. The big department store was called Cuffs and when you made a purchase the shop assistant would put the bill and your money into a capsule and then into a tube which shot the capsule up and along the ceiling to the cashier office, which would then put the receipt and change in the capsule, and back down the tube it would come to the shop

assistant. When the shopping was done very occasionally we would go to Lyons Coffee Shop and I would have a delicious crème caramel pudding. If we needed to go further afield then we took the trolley bus.

Once home, any meat purchased was put in the meat safe, which hung on a hook on the wall in the back yard. (There were no fridges). Daily the milkman delivered bottles of milk and sterilised milk; also bottles of orange drink, which stained the inside of the glass bottles, so goodness knows what it did to our insides.

The coal man and the rag and bone men used horse drawn carriages for their deliveries and on Sundays a man would come round selling pints of winkles, which we ate, by picking the winkles out of their shells with a pin, along with bread and echo margarine for our tea. Any horse droppings left behind were quickly scooped up by my father and used as fertiliser in the garden. In our street lived the local chimney sweep who came round to the house with brushes on long poles and we had to cover the furniture to stop it being covered in soot dust.

Near our house was the Armstrong Gun public house, which I only recall my parents going to at Christmas. My mother smoked Woodbine cigarettes, which she bought in packets of five, and my father smoked Senior Service.



*Wynne (nee Winifred English)  
Earl Rise c1955.*

Two items of clothing that I wore and that have now disappeared are the liberty bodice and black armbands. A liberty bodice was worn over a vest, and was a thick short-sleeved garment with a row of rubber buttons up the front and designed to keep the cold out. The rubber buttons were notoriously fiddly and difficult for us children to undo and do up. Bereaved families wore black armbands. We were soon destined to wear these.

In the summer of 1960 our house at 27 Armstrong Place was compulsorily purchased and we moved to a new council house in Bromholm Road, Abbey Wood. I then transferred to

class 3D at Alexander McLeod School.

In the late summer of 1961 my mother was taken ill and died at the end of October in St Nicholas' Hospital. She is buried at Woolwich Cemetery in Plumstead. When I returned to school a few days after the funeral nothing was said to me by any of the staff; no counselling offered, no recognition of what had happened to me, I was simply expected to get on, which I did.

My father, wearing the black armbands of mourning, was left to cope with his grief and also to bring me up unaided. He worked nights to be there for me during the day, seeing me off to school in the morning, and was there to put me to bed before going to work on the night shift. A neighbour reported this to the authorities and one day soon after two suited men came to take me into care.

My father pleaded with them not to take me away right there and then, and so, desperate to keep me, father moved us out of the area into a new life where we were never to talk again of the wife and mother we had lost or of our lives together in Woolwich. My happy childhood ended right then.

Twenty-five years later in 1986 I buried my father with my mother... together again.



*Class photo of Earl Rise Primary School c1955. Wynne is second row from front, fourth in from left*



# Woolwich Barracks

Bob Kentsley

## An inside story.

I joined the Army two days before 'D Day', which began on the 6th of June 1944.

I trained at Lanark, in Scotland, then at Redcar, in Yorkshire, Cromer, in Norfolk, Haverford West, in Wales and at Salisbury.

I became a qualified Royal Artillery surveyor. Unfortunately, by that time there was a surplus of surveyors, so the Army, in its wisdom, decided that they were short of clerks and sent me to Woolwich Barracks for training.

Most of the training camps were of the WWI era and so we were deducted thru'pence per week from our pay for the maintenance of the camps (fourpence bought 10 cigarettes in those days). However, when I reported to the Woolwich Barracks I was quite surprised to see that they resembled no other camp that I had been in, up till then.

The barracks consisted mainly of rooms, which all had polished floors, with all other woodwork being polished to a deep shine. After the old barrack rooms it felt like being in a very old fashioned hotel. I believe that the place must have been built in the 19th century.

The London Blitz was in full cry at the time. It was very unnerving again for me as I lived in Deptford before joining the Army and I had volunteered to get away from the bombing.

Fortunately for me, my stay only lasted a month and I was transferred to the peace of the countryside again.



# *Woolwich In The War*

*Allan Robinson*

The first indication of the approaching war came when our next-door neighbour came home from work and said that on Plumstead Common a large team of men were constructing a large public air-raid shelter.



This was in the early part of the summer of 1939. After tea that evening we all walked along to the Common and there opposite the 'Links' Co-op store were 50-60 men working under floodlight, using machinery that I had never seen before. Even the hand held electric saw was an item to be stared at in wonder. All this was taking place after PM Chamberlain came back from Germany waving his piece of paper and saying to the waiting

crowd, "Peace in our time".

A few weeks later, on a lovely summer Sunday morning, September 3rd, we all walked down to our local greengrocer and bought some bananas. While walking back a man came out of his house and said, "Get home quick. War has been declared!" We hurried home, but before we got there the air-raid siren went and we ran the rest of the way, looking skywards, expecting to see a German plane at any minute. None came; it was a false alarm and the 'all clear' sounded soon after. The air-raid siren's pitch for a coming raid rose and fell as if it was being switched on and off. The "all clear" was a continuous note for about two minutes.

In the next few weeks many things happened. A man went door-to-door giving out identity cards to everybody. The adults were given buff coloured cards and the under 18's were given blue. We were all given a number; mine was AZKW-91-3; the last digit meant that I was third in the family.

My mother had to go down to the town hall to collect our ration cards for food and clothing. The amount of food we were given each week would not last us a day now. My uncle, in Canada, read in the newspapers that we were starving, and sent us a large food parcel. The only two items I remember was a big tin of jam and a big tin of butter. We had never seen butter in a tin before, or since.

Sweets were also rationed, but were almost unobtainable. Petrol was only given to important people, like doctors. People that had cars, and there were not many, jacked them up on bricks and covered them up with waterproof sheets.

About this time, people were advised to "black out" their windows. We covered our windows with rubber sheeting, which found its way out of the Woolwich Arsenal; stolen of course!



*Adjusting a child's gas mask .*

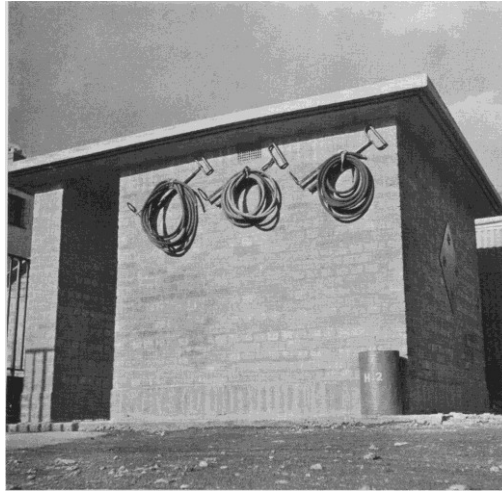
I was ten years old at this time and one day we had a mock evacuation at school. We all had to take a suitcase full of clothes to school and we had a label with our destination on it. We also had to take our gas masks, which had been delivered to our house one evening. Most people had a standard mask, but children under five were given a blue and red mask to fool them into thinking it was a Mickey Mouse mask. Babies were given a container about two-foot long and eighteen inches in diameter. The baby was placed in this and a manual pump was used to provide filtered air for the baby to breathe.

In the following weeks we had an 'Anderson' shelter put at the bottom of the garden. Two men came and dug a hole, three-foot deep, and the shelter went into this and was covered with the excavated soil.



*Gas mask practice for tiny tots*





*An ARP (Air Raid Precautions) post. Note the stirrup pumps hanging up.*

At this time the 'ARP' was formed (Air Raid Precautions) and wardens were recruited to man purpose-built, bombproof 'posts' on pieces of vacant ground. London taxis were garaged in schools and fitted with ladders and fire-fighting equipment. The latter consisted mainly of several buckets of sand and a stirrup pump.

'Dad's Army' was formed, but at first it was called the 'Local Defence Volunteers', later to be called the 'Home Guard'.

For the next few months very little happened; people started calling it a 'phoney war' and most people thought it would be all over by Christmas. Weeks went by and a glorious summer turned into a wet and cold winter. After Christmas a decision was taken to evacuate school children to the country and most children went away. A small band of children, including my brother and I, stayed behind, mainly because their parents did not wish them to go, the idea being that if we were going to be killed it was better if we all went together.

Those of us left played quite happily in the woods close by and in the streets. On the edge of the wood was a council yard, ready to build some houses. While playing around there, we uncovered an enormous pile of what we, at first, thought were boxes, but these were grey painted coffins ready for use when the air raids started.

Playing in the street one day, we were approached by a strange man who took our names and told us he was a teacher and we were to report to a nearby Working Man's Club the next day for school lessons. Here we were given homework, which we had to do and return the next day. The Working Man's Club smelt of stale beer and cigarettes and was not very nice. This arrangement went on for some time. Eventually they organised 'Plum Lane School' and all of us 'strays' went there full time.

One night I was woken up by the sound of a whistle being blown by a policeman on a bike; he was blowing for all he was worth. Dad came into my bedroom and said we had better get up and dressed. We all went downstairs, the siren went and we went out into the garden. Our next-door neighbour came out and we stood listening for a while, but it was very quiet. After about twenty minutes we all went into our house for a cup of tea, and talked until the 'all clear' went. A shared cup of tea with our neighbour became the normal thing after a raid for the rest of the war.

By now we were getting two to three air raids every week. The first afternoon raid in our road demolished a house on the corner. Later in the day, when people came home from work, a hole was found in the back garden of the house on the opposite corner. The bomb disposal team were called in and started digging for an unexploded bomb. A large section of the road was cordoned off and remained so for two weeks while they removed the bomb. Although we were having air raids we could not use the shelter in our garden as it had three foot of water in it. Eventually the council came to concrete the floor and walls up to ground level, and slowly the shelter dried out.

The air raids continued to increase both by day and night, and most people slept in their shelters. By now our shelter was nicely equipped with bunks and we were able to get a good nights' sleep, in spite of all the noise.

A lot of people painted a V sign for victory on the wall, alongside their front door. Three dots and a dash usually followed this. This was the Morse code for 'V'. Just inside the front door on many homes was a small notice that said, 'There is no depression in this house and we are not interested in the possibility of defeat, it does not exist'.

Much has been written about the 'Battle of Britain'; the history books will tell you that it lasted from the 7th to the 15th September 1940. Germany lost 1733 planes and we lost 915. When you think that most German planes were bombers, and held at least five men, while our fighters only held one man, their losses, in terms of manpower, were considerably more than ours. However, my memory tells me that most of the battle only lasted two days. In this time we saw planes fighting one another in the sky in flames. Some fell cart-wheeling down; leaving a trail like a comet and making a tremendous screaming sound.



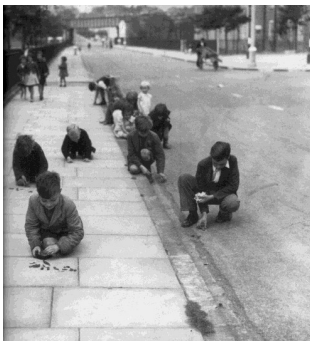
*Loading AA gun in readiness*

One Spitfire dived down, quite close to us, leaving a trail of smoke; it levelled out and the pilot jumped out using his parachute. As he floated down, a German plane machine-gunned him and he continued to float down, probably dead. We spent these two days trapped in our shelter; after the first horrible day, the 'all clear' went at six o'clock. Dad and I decided to go and get some fish and chips, and we rode our bikes, intending to go to Herbert Road where there was a fish shop that was nearly always open (most were not). When we got to the top of Plum Lane we stopped and looked down at the River Thames. From our vantage point we could see St Paul's up to the left and on our extreme right, the Ford Motor Works. In between these two points was a mass of fires: seven major fires and dozens of smaller ones blazing away into the gathering dusk.

I remember dad saying, "It looks as though the war is over." While we looked the siren went again and we raced back to the shelter. We never did get our fish and chips and all we had that day was bread, margarine and cups of tea. We spent that night and all the next day cowering in the shelter while the sky was filled with German bombers going over in tight formation. Anti-aircraft guns blazed away and shrapnel came down like rain. (When the shells exploded the resulting pieces of torn metal fragments were called shrapnel.)

It is true, of course that the battle went on for a few more days, but not as ferociously as before. One of the German planes landed in the back garden between Ann Street and Robert Street, in lower Woolwich, and word soon got round that one of the tenants was selling pieces of the plane to raise money for the war effort. I bought an unrecognisable piece of aluminium for 3d and was delighted with my bargain.

All the children, myself included, started picking up pieces of shrapnel; the reason was that if you collected a certain amount you were given a shiny Spitfire badge, which we all wore proudly.



*Collecting Shrapnel after the night air raids.*

After things quietened down again we started patching broken windows in our house with white sheeting, supplied by the council. It was not long before people found that if this material was boiled, it made excellent pillowcases, and a lot was misused in this way. Our house had sliding doors between the front and back rooms and we fixed these, as they had been blown down by

the blast from a nearby bomb.



*Inflating a barrage balloon.*

*Note all the hydrogen gas cylinders stacked on the trailers*

On the second day we had a lucky escape: we came out of the shelter during a lull and found a pile of grey ash on the grass; we looked up and saw a few broken tiles on the roof. An incendiary bomb had hit the roof and bounced off into the garden where it burnt itself out. If it had gone into our loft, the house would probably have been destroyed.

After this horrible weekend dad went back to work and mum, Rex and myself were in the shelter when a bomb fell no more than thirty feet away from us. The shelter lifted up at least six inches and rocked violently; dirt fell down from the joints in the shelter and mum said, "That's our house gone". After a few minutes I opened the door of the shelter and saw the house was still standing. Looking the other way I saw a large hole in the woods at the back of us, and that is where the bomb had landed.

One silly thing I remember is that after all the damage had taken place the council gave every house in the area five pounds to buy new curtains. I do not think anyone did, but I am sure the money came in handy.

We had a searchlight battery down the road from us, and a barrage balloon site up the road, both being about a quarter of a mile away. One evening after a raid we walked up to the balloon site because we heard that they had been hit. When we got there we found that the sleeping hut had received a direct hit, and the pile of wood and corrugated iron we were looking at contained the bodies of twelve airmen. We did not stay long.

About this time the school I was at was bombed quite badly. Luckily I had the afternoon off to go to the dentist. Nobody at the school was hurt, as they were all in the air raid shelter. This school closed, and we all went to another school. My father, who was too old for military service, was sent down to Plymouth to help build a hospital for the American troops down there. I went down to the station with him and could hardly walk the short distance back to school for the tears in my eyes. My new school was the Woolwich Polytechnic and had already been bombed, but it was such a large school that a big hole in one wall did not make any difference.

Our local newsagent asked me if I would do a paper round for him, which I did for six shillings a week (30p). I started delivering at 6 am every morning; very often there was still an air raid on, and I wore a tin hat. Due to the dark mornings and the blackout I had a torch, which I used sparingly in case there were any German bombers around.

By now there were dozens of houses bombed and abandoned. One paper I had to deliver was to the only occupied house down the bottom of Duncroft Hill. In the dark with all the temporary paper coverings on the windows flapping about, it was very spooky.

After two months my father came home and started work on what we later knew as the "Mulberry Harbour". His job, with hundreds of others, was to build an enormous wooden box in a large hole alongside the Thames on the mudflats. This box was filled with concrete to make a hollow concrete structure, about 80 feet by 60 feet.

From the top of Plum Lane we used to see barges floating down the Thames and wondered what on earth they were for: Even the men working on them did not know. Once the pouring of concrete started on these barges it could not be stopped until the barge was finished. This meant the men used to work "ghosters", day and night and sometimes part of the next day. The result of this was a very fat wage packet, and for the first time we seemed to have enough money.

Until this period money had been so short that on several occasions my mother and I would go down to Woolwich to pawn her engagement ring for a few pounds. This was usually done at dusk in the hope that nobody would see us. Even now when I see that ring, the sad

memories come flooding back.

The air raids continued and for a week we slept in the shelter. The Optical Buildings were about half a mile away from our house. This was a small factory that made bombsights, binoculars and range finding equipment. A couple of times this was obviously the target to be raided. Magnesium flares were dropped on parachutes and because of the heat rising from them, the parachutes acted as hot air balloons and hovered in the sky for five or six minutes. The light from them was so bright that although it was late at night you could have read a newspaper in our garden quite easily. Several bombs were dropped, but missed the target and fell on adjacent allotments. I do not believe the factory itself was ever hit. On these local raids the Germans dropped silver and black tape to interfere with our radar systems.

During the war we would see German bombers flying over in formation and, apart from anti-aircraft fire, it seemed very little was being done to stop them. Barrage balloons used to be flown to try to make the bombers fly at a greater height, but were more of a nuisance to us on the ground. In thunderstorms they were frequently struck by lightning and burst into flame. They also broke away quite often, causing the wire holding them to fall down across the roofs of houses, causing damage to chimney pots. Very often the RAF men spent longer retrieving wires than flying their balloons.

One day I came home from school during an air raid and found myself locked out. As I stood by the front gate a small German bomber dived down over Welton Road; as I watched, a bomb left the plane, which then zoomed away towards London. The bomb exploded in the gardens between Welton Road and Duncroft. I don't think anyone was killed, but I do know a baby sitting in a high chair was badly cut with flying glass. Mr Heron picked up the high chair with the baby in it and ran the four or five hundred yards to Timbercroft Lane School where there was a First Aid post. Mr Heron was dad's roommate in Plymouth and passed on the above story.

I was getting up at 5 am to help the newsagent get the paper rounds together, delivering my two rounds, going down to the Arsenal Station to collect the evening papers and collecting money Saturday and Sunday mornings. I received 24 shillings a week (£1.20); it does not seem much now, but at that time if a man was earning £5 a week, he was doing very nicely.



*Arsenal Railway Station.*

Another terrible incident took place in Alabama Street: under cover of darkness a German bomber dropped a sea type mine on a parachute. When it hit the ground it exploded, causing devastation over a wide area. Ordinary bombs buried themselves in the ground and damage was not so widespread. Thinking

back on it now, the scene I saw was very much like Hiroshima; a whole block of houses between Lucknow Street and Pegwell were completely flattened. Up in a tree were the remains of a green tarpaulin parachute. I never did know how many people were killed, but it must have been 50 or 60 at least. 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.

At the age of 13½ my friend and I put our ages up by 2½ years to join the Air Training Cadets. We trained as pilots and navigators, received flying instruction in a link trainer, which was an early type of flight simulator, and we did the usual foot drills. This was very useful when I was called up some years later. We also did a little bit of real flying at West Malling and Felixstowe. While at Felixstowe we had a bad air raid and the only shelter we had was a deep trench dug at the side of the field we were camping in.

Every night at Felixstowe we used to see a flotilla of motor torpedo boats going out on submarine patrol. One afternoon we were taken out to look for submarines and at the time, bobbing about in the North Sea for two hours seemed a great adventure. Looking back on it, I marvel at our stupidity because not many of us could swim.

One night after our visit to Felixstowe, a list went up on the notice board saying that if the list of cadets did not volunteer for service in the RAF they ran the risk of being called up for the coalmines as a 'Bevan Boy'. Both my and my friend's name was on the list so we had to come clean and admit that we had lied about our ages. The officer in charge was very nice about it, and let us stay on in the ATC.

After Easter 1944 I left school and started work for a relation of ours. He taught me a lot about building and plumbing, and very early on, because of the shortage of men, I was being trusted with jobs on my own. I built a wall about 20 feet long and 6 feet high, I did small plumbing jobs and when nothing else was urgent I built a large greenhouse. This greenhouse was built with materials diverted from war damage repairs being carried out in Westmount Road at the back of the Welcome Inn, Eltham. After the greenhouse was completely finished

it was filled with plants and four weeks later it was blown to pieces by a nearby bomb.

The air raids had slowed up by now and one night after the sirens had sounded we stood and watched what looked like planes with a light on the back, going up towards London at a very low level. We watched dumbstruck as these planes flew past every five minutes or so with no opposition at all. We realised after a time that the engines of these planes (which sounded like a motor bike) stopped after a time and the planes were not coming back. We concluded that at long last the Germans were landing troops, and we feared the worst.

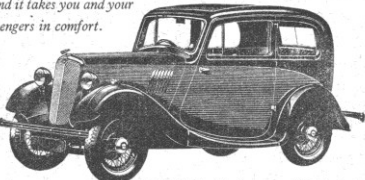

Next morning it became known to everyone, via the radio and an air raid warden who lived near us, that what we had been watching nearly all night, was Germany's new secret weapon. It was, of course, a "doodlebug", an unmanned plane with a bomb in its nose. In the next few months, dozens of them fell on London and the suburbs, causing considerable damage and deaths.

One grey and misty day, during a raid, I was coming home for dinner down a country lane known as the 'Red Road' when I heard the engine of a doodlebug approaching. I continued to walk, when suddenly the engine stopped. As I looked ahead into the mist this thing was coming straight for me. It was only a few hundred yards away and making a fluttering sound. I am not a believer in religion; the whole thing seems so illogical to me, but, this thing coming straight for me, I dived into a ditch and prayed as I have never prayed before or since. There was an enormous explosion and, realising I was still alive, I looked up to see hundreds of pieces of metal fragments, which appeared to be floating in the air. I ducked down again and covered my head with my hands, hoping that none of the pieces would hit me, which they did not.

I picked myself up and walked shakily up the lane; about three hundred yards away on some allotments was a big crater. The doodlebug must have side slipped away from me: had it continued, I would not be writing this now. On the way home a fire-fighting taxi stopped and asked me if I was all right. I expect I looked pretty dreadful, smothered in mud and shaking like a leaf. He offered me a lift home but I said I was okay and I continued home. I had to go back to work in the afternoon as I had left a pile of cement mixed up.

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In 1944 I had saved up enough money to buy a small car. The deposit was £25 with repayments of £1 a week. This bought me a very nice 'Morris Eight' in excellent condition with red leather upholstery and an unmarked black finish. There was no petrol available, so for a few months all we did was polish it inside and out.

Eventually, because dad and I were repairing bomb-damaged houses, he was granted two gallons of petrol a month for emergency use. This did not go very far, but we were able to buy black market petrol coupons from our local butcher and this enabled us to visit the coast occasionally. The roads were so quiet I was able to drive even though I was not old enough and did not have a licence.

Our firm commandeered a house in Llanover Road, right opposite the house where I had been born. We set up a carpenter's workshop in a bedroom and over the next few months we made hundreds of replacement window frames. Downstairs was a glazing room and storerooms for all kinds of building materials. It was wintertime and quite cold so our first job in the morning was to light a fire and make tea.

Some few months later dad and I were walking home from work at about 5 o'clock. As we got to the junction of Garland Road and Red Road there was an enormous flash, followed by an equally large explosion. Looking up, we saw a great cloud of debris falling down, mostly over the RAC abattoir but some falling on the road in front of us. As we turned the corner, a policeman came up from the Optical Buildings and started picking up the bits and pieces that had fallen on the road. We helped him and we took our collection of bits of pipe and glass fibre down to the factory gate for someone to examine. To the best of my knowledge this was the first 'V2' to land. This one and a few others malfunctioned. Apparently as they came through the atmosphere, they overheated and exploded too soon. A few of these rockets fell locally; the first indication of their arrival was violent earth tremors, and then the explosion followed by the sound of their engines as they came down. The reason for this was that they travelled faster than the speed of sound.

'D' Day was the 6th June 1944. Some man stopped me in the street and said we had made a landing in France. As the day progressed more and more aircraft flew over. Some were going to France and some coming back. Those that were returning were doing 'victory rolls' so we knew things were going well. How they missed the top of Shooters Hill, I do not know.

Our troops continued to make rapid progress and we did not have many more air raids. Over the next few months the news got better and better, and for the first time we knew we were going to win.

On May 1st 1945, I went to bed as usual in the dark as we had not bothered to put the blackout curtains in the bedrooms. Laying in bed with the curtains wide open the room was suddenly lit up with our nearby searchlight coming on. Thinking it was a raid coming, I jumped out of bed and I started to get dressed. Looking out of the window, I saw dozens of searchlights sweeping the sky and waving backwards and forwards. I rushed downstairs where mum and dad had the radio on and they were just announcing the end of the war in Europe. Our next-door neighbour rushed in and we sat talking until the early hours of the morning.

The next day nobody went to work and we had an impromptu party down at the corner of the road. People took cakes and sandwiches down to be shared out and a radiogram was fixed up to provide music for people to dance to.

The next Saturday afternoon we all went to a much better organised party down at Timbercroft Lane School. There was a load to eat and drink; even ice cream had come from somewhere. Various people did their party tricks and we all had a good time.

May 8th was the official 'VE' day and was declared a national holiday. At work we were so busy that it was decided that we should work and have the day off later. We never did get it but nobody minded very much because the extra money came in handy as always.

That's the end of my account of the war in Woolwich and how it affected us.

On 6th August 1945, the Americans dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima, but this was overshadowed in our family by the death of my grandfather.

2nd September 1945 was Victory in Japan day, but this did not affect us very much as our war was really over before that.

I would like to say that we all lived happily ever after, but that was not so. Shortages continued for many years and we went without quite a few things. Rationing did not finish completely until 3rd July 1954. I think meat was the last to come off ration.

I do feel that if the country had left Winston Churchill in power, things would have recovered much quicker. For some unaccountable reason he was thrown out in favour of a Labour government at a time when we really needed a good leader. I suppose in better times we would have received counselling, but none was available for us.

I think the only lasting effect on me is that if I hear an air raid siren on TV, it still sends a chill up my spine. At night if I look out and see a moonlit sky with a few clouds, I still think "nice night for a raid".

I must finish this the way that I started; by saying every word you have read is true. I have written this account of my war in the hope that my children, grandchildren and possibly their children should understand what we went through.

At the outbreak of war I was ten years old. I lived with my mother and father, Julia and Eddie Robinson, and my brother Rex, who is eight years younger than me. We lived at 86 Warland Road, Plumstead, London, SE18. Our road was aptly named, as we had no less than thirteen bombs and many small incendiaries dropped on it.

*Editor's note: All photos have been 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)'*



# *Woolwich Market, A Brief History*

*Michele Jewell*

Woolwich Market was the first market to be granted a Charter by King James 1.



*The Market, Beresford Square, Woolwich. c1900. All Photos: Michele Jewell.*

The original market was in Market Hill. The market traders gradually set up on Beresford Square, because of the increasing number of Arsenal workers who provided a brisk trade. The stallholders deserted the 'official' site even though the local authorities tried to abolish the Beresford Square site. Good pitches became so popular that they were fought over the night before market day.

My great, great, great grandmother, Alice Hicks, and her husband Jim, had to wait overnight for a pitch on the Square before the 1888 Charter legalised the market. They had one of the first stalls.

Polly (daughter of Alice and Jim) and her husband, Joe Ford, waited all night for a 'good pitch' in the 1890s when permits were first issued to market traders to sell fresh produce. Their main selling items at that time were rabbits. Polly sold the skins of rabbits as well as the meat.

Polly used to row over the other side of the water to catch her rabbits. Family say that Polly could skin a rabbit quicker than anyone without tearing the fur. Polly and Joe also sold apples and oranges from boxes outside the Arsenal Gates.



*Woolwich Market stall holders.*



*Polly and Joe Ford, c.1910.*



*Grandfather Delieu, and on his left is Arthur Delieu and Nan in the barrow. c.1917 - 1918. She was born in 1915.*

My family went on to sell fruit and veg. My great grandmother Charlotte Delieu married Arthur Delieu. Arthur worked with his father, William Henry Delieu on his stall. They sold a lot of Fyffes bananas and Charlotte earned the nickname 'Banana Lady'. This title later went to her daughter Louise. She was also known as 'Banana Lou'.

The stallholders were all known as 'Square Heads'.



*Granny Delieu, great grandmother Charlotte, known as 'Banana Lady'.*

In 1929 the Prince of Wales (later King Edward V111), came to Woolwich. It was during the Depression, when unemployment was high. To cheer everyone up, Joe and Polly's daughter (my great grandmother), Charlotte Delieu, approached H.R.H as he walked through the market and asked him 'Sir, would you like a straight banana?' It is said he accepted the banana with thanks!

Hicks, Fords most of the stallholders ended up marrying each other! The Delieu's, Manchester's, Dennard's, Biddle's, Gould, Ellis etc were all the main names of Woolwich Market and are all related.

The Square was used for other activities as well. On Thursday afternoons and Sunday evenings, tricksters and 'dentists' arrived.

My grandmother, Lilian Sculley (granddaughter of Polly) said her mother Charlotte Delieu and her aunt used to dance around the man pulling teeth outside Woolwich Arsenal. There was no anaesthetic or chloroform. The man having his teeth pulled would be screaming. She said her mum and her sister used to dance around and sing so people waiting wouldn't hear the screams!



*Beresford Square 1905. Photo: Greenwich Heritage Centre.*

She also recalled someone selling ointment claiming to cure everything. She said her brother bought some because he had hard skin on his feet. Apparently he couldn't walk for a month afterwards because all the skin, not just the hard skin, the layers as well had all rolled up. He couldn't put his feet on the ground for a month!



*Memorial card for Louis Napoleon, Emperor Of The French, who died at Camden House, Chislehurst January 9th 1873. Kind permission of Liz Thompson.*

I remember my grandmother (Lillian Sculley) telling me her grandmother Polly Ford had an illegitimate child by the Prince Imperial, a cousin of Queen Victoria. The Prince Imperial was a second generation Bonaparte. Apparently she was his mistress and had a special licence to sell fruit inside the Woolwich Barracks. It all sounds a bit far fetched but the story could have an element of truth somewhere, as I believe The Prince lived at Chislehurst. Polly is alleged to have had a son by him. (I have been doing my family tree for eight years and haven't found any evidence so far!)

My grandmother was Lilian Delieu, eldest child of Charlotte and Arthur Delieu. She married George Henry Stone. He was killed in WW2, aged 28. He was a Sergeant in the R.A.F and was a wireless operator/gunner. He was on leave but had gone back to the airfield to get some belongings, there was a scramble and they were a man short. He volunteered and unfortunately nothing was heard from the crew again. It is presumed they were all killed. He is commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial.

My nan married again to Len Sculley, who was the brother of her sister Louise.



*Beresford Square in early times.*

My dad used to work on the stalls as young boy on Saturdays. He was always told, "Don't give them the nice fruit from the front, give them the ones from the back". Dad said the fruit at the back was often rotten



*Dad as a boy at Bloomfield School 1949.*



*Dad, George Stone, and brother Peter.*

I remember going there with my dad as a child and buying a box of chocolate covered mint creams. They tasted funny and made me sick!



*Lizzie Ford - husband of William Ford (possibly Charlotte's brother). 1965.*

At Christmas the fruit and veg stall holders used to put on intricate displays of their produce. The stalls used to stay open all night. My grandmother, Lillian Sculley, used to have the job of taking tea and bacon sandwiches up. All the men would be sitting behind her dad's stall, at the back, playing cards. They used to have a crate of beer as well. The men used to give her half a crown each. Her dad used to wrap every other orange and every other tangerine in silver paper.

The grapes hung in bunches from a flap that used to come over the top of the stall. It couldn't be done on Christmas Eve morning, so they used to do it the night before and then not pack up. It was then all ready for the customers in the morning and it all looked lovely.

The following information is from my friend Cheri Chisnall. Her uncle, Joe Sherry, was the man who collected the rent for the stalls on the Square.

Mrs Daly (Delieu) was the mother of his best friend Billy Delieu. He also mentioned The Elephant & Castle, but that's a long way from Woolwich (is there a connection?)

The only money lender he knew was Mrs Buttress of Gough Street. She had a son.

Mr Alkinson (nick name Salome) also a money lender, for £1 lent you paid 1/- per week interest.

The Leach family had the Sarsaparilla Stand, Lenny was their son, went to school with Joe, (Lenny went to Tripoli in the last war, but the boat was blown up on its way home, Joe says

he had lost a good friend.)

The Gauld family - sold Salad.

Biddle family - sold Fish.

Alkinson family - sold Sweets.

Sherry Joe (son)... sold China and also helped people with electric lighting for their stalls.

Sherry Joe (father) delivered and let stalls to stall holders.

One x four foot long stall at 5/- per day.

(100-150 stalls in Beresford Square and 80 in Powis Street, Woolwich)

The stall would be collected at the end of the day and kept in a yard in Spray Street, Taylor's Buildings near the railway.

Tom Dribbler helped with the stalls Monday & Wednesday.

Sherry (Jimmy) sold Shell Fish. (Oysters etc)

Cherry family sold Fruit.

Gerry family sold fantastic Fish & Chips.

Delieu Family sold Bananas.

Joe Sherry Jr went to school with Billy Delieu.

Mr Banner was the Schoolmaster at Union Street School.

Ned Clifford Toll Keepers.

Dan Daneen was a hard man and not well liked.



*Beresford Square c1997. (L. Manchester fruit stall)*

*Photo: Bert Hooper.*

# Woolwich Market, A Brief Bookies Runner Story

Peter Waller

An interesting addition to the stories about the Market is this short story.



On showing my aunt the picture of Beresford Square where there is a tall looking man in the centre of the picture, walking at 45 degrees to the camera. My aunt said, 'That's Jack's dad'. She then went on to tell me his name was Joe Gennings and aside from other things he did, he was one of the many bookies who stood around the Square accepting business from the store and stallholders and Royal Arsenal workers. I asked her if she was sure of her facts and to my great surprise she then referred me to the old photograph on her dresser, slightly browned with age, representing the exact same image as that of the photo.

The man is not my relative but the father of the husband of my aunt. His name was Jack Gennings and lived and died in Woolwich with a short spell in the army during the war where he experienced some tough action.



# *Years Gone By.*

*Brian Collins*

I was born in September 1935 in Plumstead.

We lived in Bassant Road on Plumstead Common, in flats. We were bombed out in the war and I was evacuated and I spent about five years in south Devon, until around 1946.

When we returned to Plumstead I was eleven years old in 1946/47.

I went to Wickham Lane School until I was fifteen. I left school to start work in a garage.

My teacher was a Mr Griffin, ex RAF, the Headmaster was Dicky Whale. He only had one leg and one arm as a result of injuries that he had received in WWI. Another teacher was Tichy Palmer.

I remember the good times we had as young lads. I remember Roy Penwarden and Gordon Manley who lived next door.

Some of the games we played in the road together were Tin Can Tommy, Knock Down Ginger and of course Cowboys & Indians up on the Common.

I recall the bonfire nights at Guy Fawkes and the parents used to block the road off at each end with their cars and the hot spuds in the fire after.

Up on the Common I remember the park keeper called Nitty Whiskers. He had a little brown dog that used to dig up our catapults that we used to bury and hide on the common. The parky used to chase us.

I recall the VE street party, which we held in our top part of Sladedale Road.

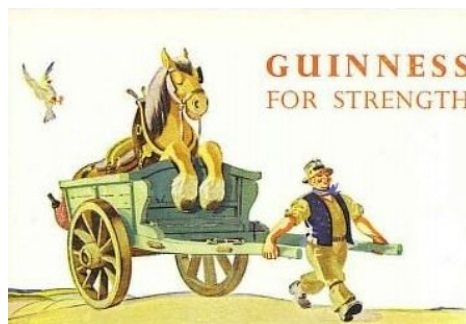
Those were the good days, and then we all grew up... ha! Ha! Ha!

I remember our motorbikes. My friend, Mark Weightman, I think had a vintage Rudge. Mine was a Matchless 500 and Roy Penwarden's was a BSA.

Sadly, in some ways, time has moved on. We moved to Griffin Road in 1962 then we moved to Crawley.

I now live in Burgess Hill in Sussex, a very nice town.

I am very happily married. We have three children and now we have four grand kids, all good kids. (2008)



# Young Charlie Reed's Accident

Colin Weightman

It was a lovely sunny day and, as usual, the Sladedale Road kids were out and about doing what they were good at: playing!

Before long Charlie was watching Robert, an older friend, who lived just across the road from him. Bob, as he was known, was from a large family by the name of Beacham. Bob was riding his bike up and down the road. He asked Charlie if he would like a ride and the next thing they were away round the block. Perched on the cross bar and Bob's strong legs pumping away, the wind blew into young Charlie's face as they gathered more speed as they neared Dickins corner sweet shop.

Once up and around Goldsmid and along Lakedale Road Bob was now puffing a bit with the effort. But as the road began to level out and the top end of Sladedale Road was in sight they picked up more speed. They soon turned into Sladedale Road and began the very steep decent down the hill, gathering speed rapidly! The houses were just a blur now, as young Charlie hung on even more tightly to the handlebars. It seemed as if they was doing a good hundred miles an hour or more!

Then it happened!

I remember finding out about the accident later on that day. I went straight over to see how young Charlie was. I was invited into the front room where Charlie was sat in a comfortable armchair. His heavily bandaged foot was resting, propped up. I remember thinking, 'That's an impressive amount of bandage around poor Charlie's foot!' Charlie told me all the grisly and gruesome details. I was very impressed and also with how well young Charlie had taken it all, his mischievous face was smiling away bravely as he related the terrible details to me. Details such as how his foot had gone into the spokes of the speeding bike's wheel!



time when us kids thought we could flipping well fly and, ... we actually flipping did!



Charlie Reed aged about 8.

*The hill they came tearing down. (2004)*

I have recently heard that Charlie has since then had a few broken ankles and his ankle is still in a mess. He has also had to suffer with terrible back pain over the years, all as a direct result of this horrible childhood accident that happened on that fateful day, around fifty years ago, around abouts 1956. A

# *You'd Never See This In Sladedale Road*

## *David Morrison's Surprise and Anne Spurr's story*

This was a fantastic day with my parents and probably the first Rolls Royce in Sladedale! We all had a pretty humble life at Sladedale – not much in the way of mod cons – we never had a bathroom and never got anywhere close to owning a car! My folks lived in rented accommodation all their lives and must have made great sacrifices to see my sister and I through a good education, including through university. So, in my folks' later years and to show some appreciation, especially as mum wasn't very well, my wife to be and I thought it would be great to hire a Rolls Royce and take them into the country for a picnic.

And this is what we did. We took them for a trip to Leeds Castle in Kent. Then, when we got back, I gave the neighbours rides round the block in the car. This was a real one-off and we were glad that we did it.

My folks died well over 20 years ago. (2008)



*The Rolls with mum and dad outside 75 Sladedale Road.*

### **Recollections of some of my neighbours.**

Neighbours who I was good friends with were Pete and Yvonne Steele. Pete was in the police (CID, I think) and I guess having no children focussed his energies on his fantastic model aircraft, which were painstakingly made to exhibition quality. He also made me a model RAF airport, complete with hangers, lights and a runway. I always remember Yvonne as somewhat glamorous and Pete as someone very kind to me and whose model making skills perhaps inspired some patience in me. He was keen on bird watching and also tended to have some relatively "exciting" cars for the time.

Pete's mother ("Mrs Steele!") who I think also lived with them, was a slight, slim, smartly dressed, dark-haired lady who again was always kind to us. She took me on an outing to Southend once and we went in a small motorboat on a pleasure pond, my first boating experience, and I still have the photo! I could not have been very old then, maybe 5 'ish. I have no idea how this outing came about or why she singled me out, one of the mysteries that again are taken for granted at the time, but looking back on it I guess she perhaps missed not having grandchildren and so expressed her affections on us.

Doris & Arthur Shepherd were good friends of my parents. Doris ("Doll") was a home person who did not like risks or venturing too far and in many ways seemed an unlikely match for ex-guardsman and impressive figure. Arthur, always walked bolt upright and was a model of society - a great man with very strong principles - absolutely trustworthy. When I returned from VSO and lived for a short time back at Sladedale Road, he and I used to go out once a week to play billiards in the smoke filled local snooker halls (normally at Bexleyheath). He was pretty skilled and had a lot of experience - even having once played an exhibition match with Joe Davis. It is such a pity that we often take for granted these friendships at the time and of course cannot now express our thanks and appreciation. I wish he were still around.

The Hooper's were our closest friends, and direct neighbours. There were four children - Tony, Bert, Pam and Fay. I used to knock around with Bert a lot, exploring the Common and trying to see what the nurses were up to in the hospital accommodation! Bert was one of these boys who was naturally street-wise and it was on the walks to Sunday school that he was able to explain to me the basic mechanics and mysteries of sex! He made the most of his talent and his supreme confidence and "street wisdom" and he soon made a new life for himself in Canada. We once rigged up a basic communication system between our rooms (using some old wartime headphones) across "the divide" between our houses and were able to chat at night. I don't think it worked that well though... He will maybe be surprised that I still have (and sometimes play) the old 8-bass Hohner accordion he gave me about half a century ago! Bert Weedon was the popular guitarist at the time, and Bert used to copy him on his electric guitar. Mabel was very kind to my parents as they got older and would regularly call in and help with shopping. She was a real "brick" of a friend. We had no bathroom at No.75 at the time, so Sunday morning was bath time for me at the Hooper's! I still occasionally hear from Pam (Christmas card). Funny the things you remember, but in the early days they had a huge bulldog called "Linda"! Also, I used to run model aircraft engines in the yard with not a thought for whether it might annoy anyone. It must have been so irritating hearing that screaming engine hours on end, but no one complained. Folk

seemed so much more tolerant then. I also used to shoot the chimney pots with my air gun - highly dangerous and irresponsible. I'd also have to admit that as kids we used to chuck stuff over the fence "down the 'oller" to get a reaction from the houses way below, in Roydene Road. How stupid! If my grandkids did anything like this today, I'd go spare!

Another close friend was Trevor Slack. He and I were born in the same ward in Woolwich in 1946 and stayed close friends for years. His family lived in Viewland Road, across the Common. He has one brother, Roger, a brilliant academic mathematician. Trevor and I developed a keen interest in photography and then later, when I returned from VSO, learned to sail on the Thames at Greenwich. We then built a Mirror dinghy together at his house and later raced it. He still lives in South London, at Charlton. (2008)

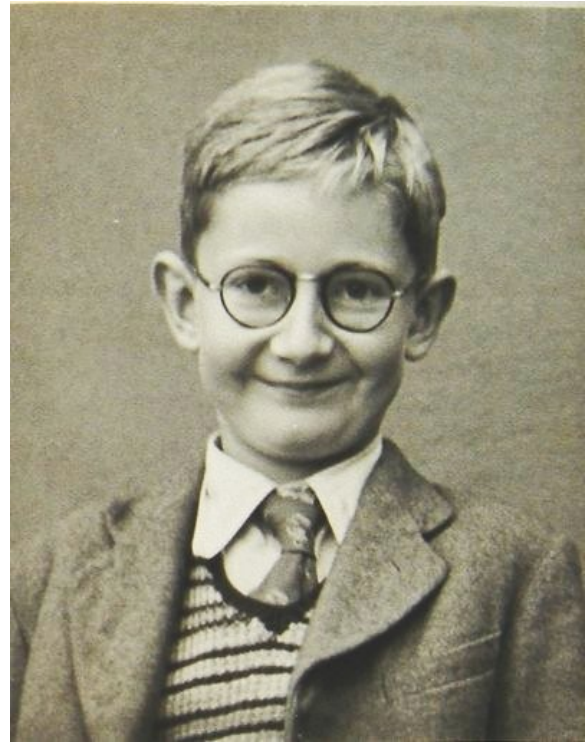
**Some early times.**



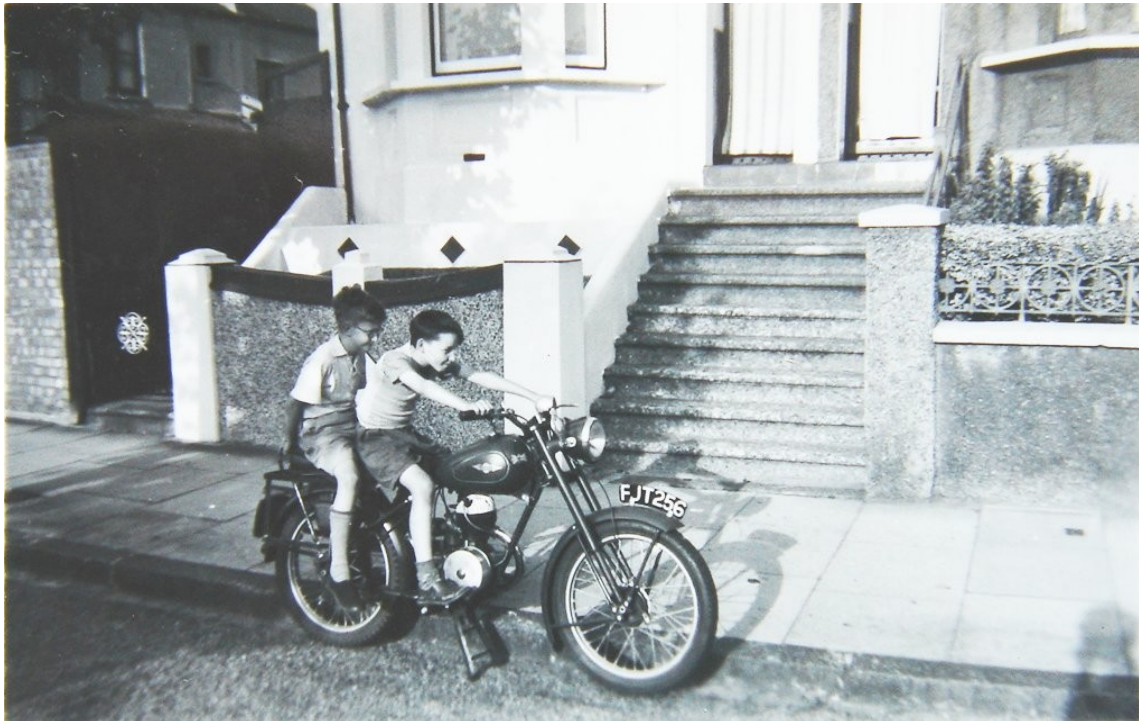
*David aged five, with mum on the Woolwich ferry, c1951.*



*Aged seven, Nov 1953*



*. and aged nine.*



*David as pillion with neighbour friend Colin, on Colin's older brother Mark's motorbike, c1954.*



*Gallions Mount School 1952. I'm 5<sup>th</sup> from left, second row down.*



*David in a Gallions Mount School play, 1952.*

Winter, 1963, Sladedale Rd.



*Icicles outside Dave's bedroom.*



*Ann's husband Roy's Ford car. The 'oller fence is behind it.*

**Anne Spurr (nee Morrison) David's sister adds:**

Ivy, George, Anne and David Morrison lived in "The Cottage" at 138 Riverdale Road. David was born in 1946 and we needed more room, so the family moved to No.89 Sladedale Road. We moved in that dreadful winter. A lot of our belongings were under tarpaulins, with snow on top, for weeks in the small front garden.

Mrs Steele lived next door at 91. She was very good to us. When Princess Elizabeth got married, she took me to London and we stood at the end of Westminster Bridge to see Princess Elizabeth and all the procession travel to Waterloo Station. If you have ever seen the film "Genevieve", where the car got stuck in the tramlines, well that was the curve in the road where we stood. Mrs Steele had her wrist in plaster and I recall being brought to the front of the crowd, being short and young.

I went to Haberdasher's Aske's Girls' School 1947-1955 and during my long bus journeys, as well as doing homework, I used to knit garments for Mrs Steele and earned quite a bit of pocket money that way.

Mr & Mrs Bishop lived at No 87 and were a lovely couple. They were the first family, so far as I know, to have a television set in our road. She used to allow me to pop in to see Annette Mills with "Muffin the Mule" and also Norman Wisdom, who were so popular at that time.

As soon as a three bedroomed house became available from our landlord, we moved into No 75 Sladedale.

I had always wanted a "sister", so after the war, a baby did arrive, a brother David. He spent the first few weeks in my doll's pram, as you had to order a pram and it was so difficult to get one on time. We were in Riverdale Road at that time, in February 1946 and Mum had to cut the sides of the door frame on the front door, with a bread knife, to allow the pram through the front door! It was a Marmet style and had thick metal rods down the side. It proved even more of a problem when lugging it up and down the steps at No 89!! Mum was forty years old by now and used to get so cross when folks asked her if the baby in the pram was her grandson!

I have always been thrilled to have a brother and David has always been a great support.

David and I owe a great deal of debt to our parents. When I reached the Fifth Year and passed my exams, I expected to leave school at 16 and hoped to enter the Scientific Civil Service. My dear Head Mistress, Miss Elsie Dyson, daughter of the Astronomer Royal Sir Frank Dyson, invited my mum to meet her at school and convinced her to let me stay on into the 6th form. This must have given my parents a lot of extra work and it was at that time mum went to work at Morgan's, the butchers shop in Lakedale Road.

She helped me to go right through the 6th form and also on to University at Royal Holloway College, where I achieved my BSc Hons. London in Chemistry. I was the first person in all our family to enter University and the pattern was set. It was easier in principle, when David's turn came and he too had all their wonderful support.

Mum's maiden name was Lincoln. My granddad, William Walter Lincoln, worked as a foreman bricklayer and built the St Francis Mission in Bannockburn Road. He built, into the top wall, a patterned brick CROSS. I wonder if it is still there? Last time I visited the area, the mission hall has been change into a Mosque!

The National Health Service is celebrating 60 years. (2008)

I was born at the "British Hospital for Mothers and Babies" at Wood Street Woolwich in 1936, well before the Health Service was set up and families used to pay into a local "panel" every week, to help with health costs, so that hospital must have been the state of the art at that time and mum and dad must have had to pay.

George (dad) worked for 15 years as a Clerk in the Members' Dining Room at the Houses of Parliament and travelled to and fro on late trams to Westminster, when they were first married in 1931. He was not allowed to leave his desk until the House finished "sitting" and that was often very late. They never thought, at that time, to move nearer to the work, people did not move far from their roots then.

When the war came, he was called up and went into the Royal Artillery and was based at Shooter's Hill on the 'Ak-Ak' guns. When the war ended, he never went back to the Houses of Parliament, but went to Transport House in London to work for them and was later transferred to Charlton. He worked on the 'Routemaster Buses'. He had a good friend Mr Elliot, who built working model trams, and had a track in his garden; hence the photo of David, who used to love to ride on them.



Ivy, George, Anne, and David outside No 75 1953.



David with Mr Elliot's model tram.

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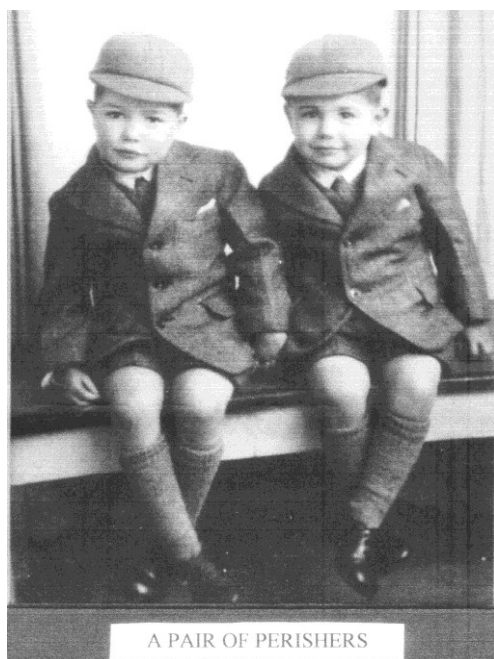
# *Young Memories Of Plumstead.*

*Derek Johnson*

My first recollection of anything was of myself and my brother lying on the floor of a railway carriage, in the corridor, on the way to Wales having been evacuated from Plumstead during WWII.

I was born at St Nicholas Hospital in 1938 just prior to the war and my brother Roy was born at St Alfege's Greenwich on the last day of 1939.

A few years later I was to be a regular visitor to St Nicholas Hospital owing to a brittle wrist, which I broke three times. I had to have heat treatment and my arm was in plaster. The third time I broke it my brother was on an outing with the church to Bostall Woods and tripped and broke his right arm, the same as mine and, as my mother dressed us alike, people thought we were twins. It was quite amusing to see 'twins' dressed the same with their right arms in plaster. We were asked, "Are you twins?" to which we replied "No, but my mum says we are a pair of perishers.



*Derek, on left, and Roy, c1943.*



*Derek's father is third from left, front row.*

My father was in a 'reserved occupation' during the war and it was at Lakedale Road Fire Station he became a Company Officer in the Auxiliary Fire Service. He also served at Shooters Hill fire station in Lion Road. My ex-father in law, Albert Barton, also served with him for a while. When the fire service celebrated 50 years of the 'Victory in Europe' (VE Day) he attended a service at St Paul's Cathedral at which there was a figure of a serviceman clothed in WWII apparel. My father noticed it did not have a belt of spanners on. He found out that they did not have one and my father was able to supply this as he still had his original belt of spanners, (his leggings too, but these had perished) and this is on view at the Fire Service Museum, Blackfriars. (My brother Roy and I went around with my dad at the end

of the war collecting up the fire fighters uniforms in a 'Green Goddess' fire engine, as they were nick named, but he did not hand his own uniform in.)



*Lakedale Road Fire Station WWII. In front of the 'Green Goddess' fire tender.*

After a bomb had dropped in St Nicholas churchyard and damaged Church Manorway School I attended Bannockburn School, later referred to as High Street School. I recall that I got a spoonful of malt and cod liver oil every morning and once in a while the 'nit nurse' inspected our heads. After Church Manorway I attended Bostall Lane School.

When it was Empire Day (24th May) we attended school in our Cub and Brownie uniforms and marched around the Union Flag. We were then given a half-day holiday in celebration.

Further down Bannockburn Road stood St Francis Mission and as it was C of E it was linked to St Nicholas Church. I was a Choirboy at St Nicholas Church and St Francis Mission Bannockburn Rd, now a Hindu temple. I was also a Cub at the church, The 2nd Borstals. Because of it being bomb damaged we held our services at St Francis where eventually I became a choirboy, from the age of nine. Practice was every Friday evening and the choirmaster was a Dickie (Richard) Richardson, who was also the organised. He eventually became the organised at St John's Church, Welling. Some other members were Malcolm Rayner, who I later encountered at St Olave's Grammar School (an excellent pianist and organist) and his brother Stuart Rayner (who ended up at the Blue Coat School) also a Derek Potter.

At Easter we paraded round the mission in our Cossacks. Sometimes we were asked to sing at weddings. The organised 'Dickie' took the choir out for a Christmas treat to the Royal Artillery Theatre, Woolwich, where we saw the then unknown 16 year old Tony Hancock play Buttons in Cinderella.

Back in the High Street, opposite the school, stood the Methodist Central Hall, a big imposing building. My mother being a Methodist had wanted us to attend this church but as it incurred crossing the road she settled for us attending the Mission but when the Curate of St Nicholas wanted me confirmed she refused as I had been christened in Popular Methodist Church where my parents were members.

When we were at Church Manorway School I remember running home during the dinnertime for a bowl of soup in the shelter in the garden. One such time I recall seeing a Spitfire chasing a Doodlebug and flying alongside it and tipping its wing with his own wing in an effort to upset the gyroscope so causing it to crash into the marshes.

Because we lived near to the Arsenal when it was bombed in September 1940 my father took us to our relatives in Croydon, sheltering en route at Robertson's jam factory in Lewisham. Then because of a raid on Croydon Airport we went to Popular where my grandparents lived, right by Blackwall Tunnel, in Grosvenor Buildings. One night whilst sheltering from a raid Grosvenor Buildings were hit and so we were evacuated to Wales, hence my first memory.

My parents were born in Popular and when they moved in 1936 they came to Plumstead and bought a new house for the princely sum of 345 pounds. As dad worked at Silvertown in the India rubber Co works making tyres, including aircraft tyres, he was in a 'reserved' occupation. He cycled from Plumstead to Woolwich and through the foot tunnel to Silvertown. I'd run down Brookdene Road in the evening and wait for dad for a lift back home on the cross bar of his bike. There was a park that ran from Church Manorway down behind the houses in Brookdene Road that had its railings removed for the 'war effort' and the park was turned into allotments.

The house my father bought was in Birkdale Road, two streets from the Dartford to London railway line and halfway between the Abbey Wood and Plumstead stations. During the war there was an anti aircraft gun that was mounted on a railway carriage called 'Big Bertha' which traversed this line. Just over the crossing on the left was the ROF (Royal Ordnance Factory) Football ground where we used to collect up empty lemonade bottles and take them back to the kiosk for which we received one penny (1d) deposit per bottle. Another way of earning money was to take the empty jam jars back to the jam factory in abbey Wood. This entitled us to a farthing (1/4d) per jar returned.

Early in the morning a horse and cart belonging to the RACS used to pass along Brookdene and Blithdale Road on its way to the jam factory and if we timed it right we would run behind it and, with its tail flap down, jump aboard' it for a ride to Bostall Lane School. The carrier knew we were there but didn't stop us. I remember during the severe 1947 winter snow the milkman borrowed a sledge to convey his milk to the door.

Cars were not very frequently seen in our street. My father was the first to own one in ours, in 1951. Having ordered it in 1947, a Ford (reg no. XM 665) and the choice was any colour so long as it was black! My father having driven fire engines during the war never took a drivers test!

I recall that when I was a Cub we had to know how to lay and light a fire, boil an egg, darn a sock and identify the nearest telephone box and hydrants, in case of fire. Winn's Common

was where the Cubs used to hold their sports meeting. It was also, incidentally, where the Arsenal (Gunners) football team started playing.

Just down from the footbridge over the railway lines is were the allotments and a cricket pitch. It was at this ground where some youngsters were killed by lightning when it struck their bikes. *\*(See story: Killed By Lightning.)* My dad had an allotment over the railway line which went into the Arsenal and on a Sunday we would push our home made wheelbarrow, loaded with the gardening tools, over to the allotment to tend the vegetables. You could hear the skylarks singing and smell the piggery, situated in White hart Lane, when the breeze was from that direction. Near the entrance of the railway line into the Arsenal there was a WWII pillbox in which the occupants had drawn a rather nude young lady and we used to gaze at her as part of our early sex education awareness.

On Saturdays the trams were packed with Charlton Athletic football supporters travelling to the 'Valley'. The problem with the trams



was the tram lines were in the middle of the road and if any cars tried to overtake they usually did this on the inside of the road, between tram and the path. This was all right until it reached the stretch of road by the 2nd gate of the Arsenal, (near the motorbike factory) where the tramline came in towards the kerb. This would result in a squashed car!

Sometimes we would meet dad on his way home, without his bike, in Woolwich in order to go to the pictures at the Granada or the Odeon cinema. At the Granada the organ used to rise up out of the floor during the interval, played by the well known organised of the day such as Robinson Cleaver or Reginald Dixon.

Crossing the river by ferry was always exciting, especially watching the engines at work. In later years with my bike on the way to work in the docks I would stand by the chimneystack funnel for the warmth. One day when crossing the river the boat suddenly pulled up in order to let a body float pass (someone who had fallen/jumped into the river?) This was later picked up by the River Police launch from North Woolwich Pier. Whenever it was going to



rain you could smell the Thames. It was so polluted that if you fell into it you needed a stomach pump. On joining the Port of London Authority (PLA) and being posted to the docks you had to learn to swim within six months of joining. My working life consisted of working in the Royal Docks from 1955 to 1975, first with the PLA and the HM Customs before I obtained a transfer to Erith in 1975.

The foot tunnel was closed to cyclist between the hours of 7am-8am in the morning and 5-6



pm because of the Dockers and other workers at Siemens etc. using the tunnel. At each end of the tunnel were the lifts where you queued. Cyclists used to (when hours permitted) queue alongside and were the first allowed into the lifts in order to place their bikes along the back wall of the lift. When the age of the 'mini-skirt dawned any young lady wearing the mini who walked up the stairs was

immediately followed by a large number of the queuing men. Most of the young women worked at the Tate & Lyles factory, Silvertown. The lift had the regulatory notice stating: 'No Expectorating Allowed' (Spitting) because of the fear of TB at that time.

I recall the policeman on point duty in the road in Beresford Square. The big Catholic Church was by the bus stop opposite the Curzon cinema on the high pavement. On the right, further down, was the Woolwich Tabernacle Church, then a water cistern, for fire fighting, and then the Woolwich Empire theatre (*See story: The Woolwich Empire Remembered.*) The theatre was eventually demolished to make way for a multi-storied mechanised car park that was opened by Princess Margaret and never worked and so was in turn demolished. Just before the ferry there was the Woolwich Power Station in front of which were Victorian flats.

In finishing, it was rumoured that there was a tunnel between St Nicholas Church and Lessness Abbey, but of course this was only a rumour. Although St Nicholas Church was out of action (the roof caught light whilst being repaired after the bombing) the Crypt was usable and the older members of the Sunday School met in a corrugated tin hut. At times I was excluded from these meetings because of my behaviour until the vicar threatened to inform my mother, where upon it improved! I was also suspended from the 'Gang Show', apart from playing a piano duet with my brother.

It was only in the last three years (2008) that I discovered from my mother (at the age of 90) that when my brother and I were in the pram my mother used to walk from Plumstead (Birkdale Road) through Woolwich, Charlton and the Blackwall Tunnel to her mother in Popular because she didn't have the fare for the trams. I believe my father who arrived from work on his bike gave her the return fare.

One Saturday at the Plaza cinema my brother won a prize for sewing a picture, which had been issued in the previous week. Unfortunately he was not well and could not attend. However, I collected his prize for him, an ice-lolly! Because it was his prize, I held it in my hand till I reached home and, of course, there wasn't very much left by then!

