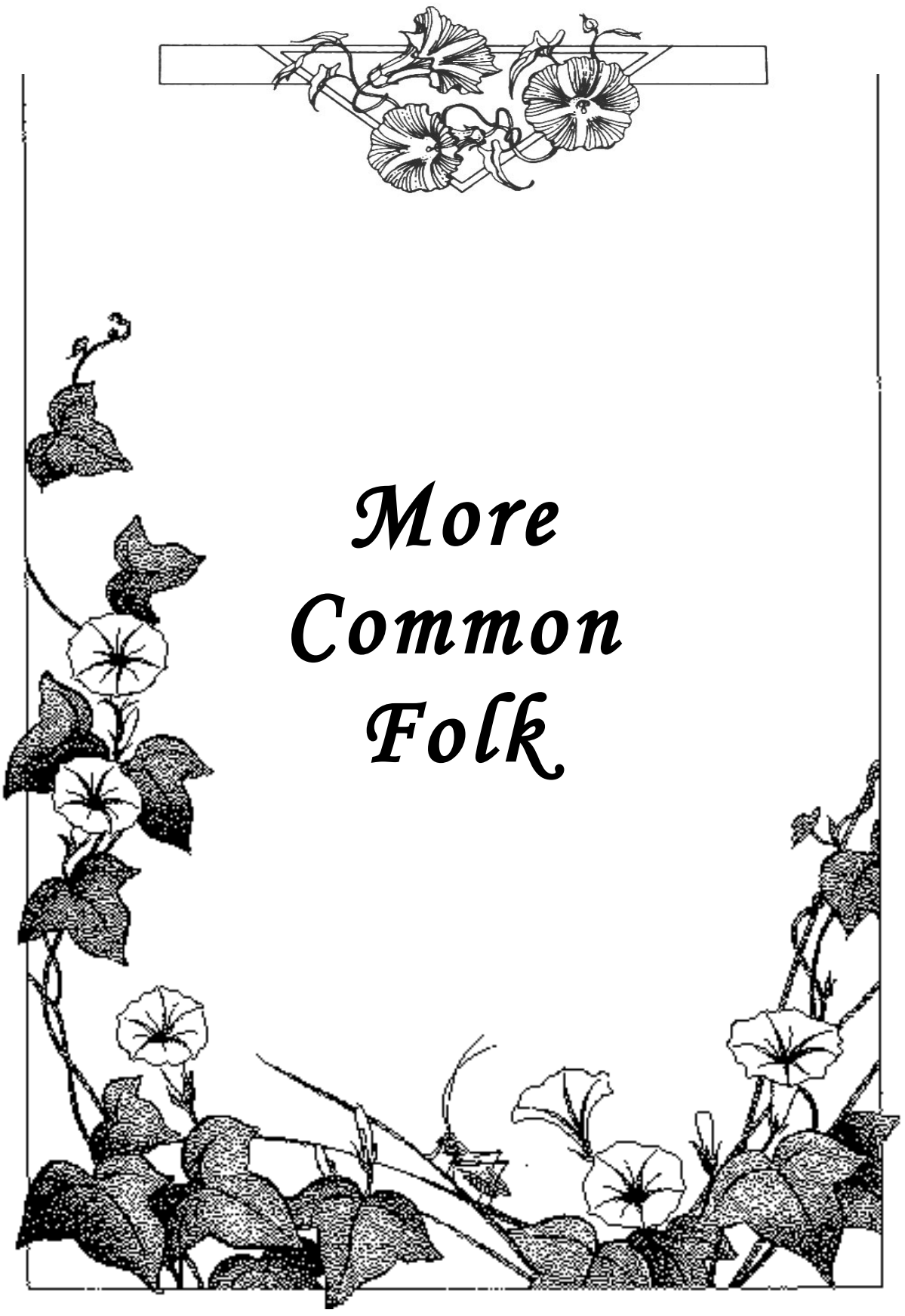
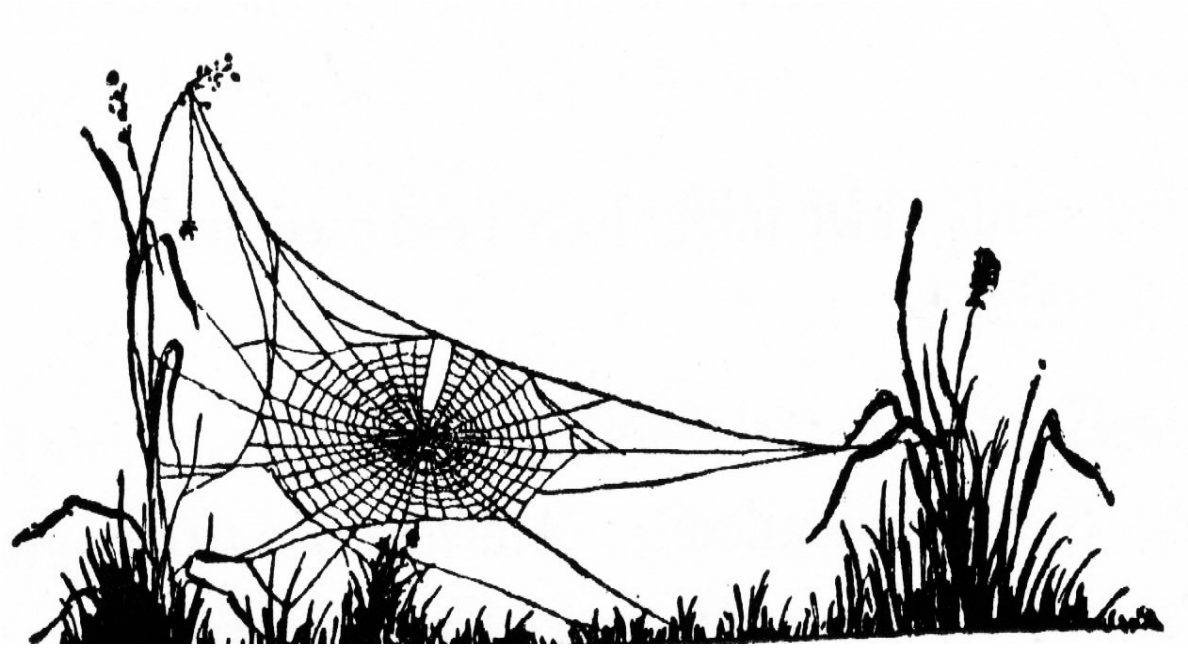


More Common Folk

Cover Photo:
Earl Rise Coronation Street Party 1953.
Photo: Lesley Turner, nee Wakeman.

More Common Folk



Edited & Compiled by
Colin Weightman

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"Stories"
PO Box 15-324
Miramar, Wellington 6243
New Zealand.

We'll talk of sunshine and of song,
And summer days when we were young;
Sweet childish days that were as long
As twenty days are now...
William Wordsworth (1770 - 1850)

Memories

Fret not about the aches and pains of time,
'cos, try as we might,
we can not hold onto, nor still, our sunset years.
Instead, perhaps,
immerse yourself, just occasionally,
in those yesteryear memories,
bathe in their fragrance, sufficient at least,
to be pleasantly refreshed enough to enjoy the now.

Colin Weightman 2010.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
bears all its sons away:
They fly forgotten as a dream
dies at the opening day.

Verse 5 of hymn: Our God, our help in ages past.
Isaac Watts 1674-1748.

Preface

As I mentioned in my previous book, *Common Folk, volumes 1 and 2,* 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, *More Common Folk*,' still reflects how these areas, in particularly the commons, has had such 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 too. 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 also 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, as was the same in my last book. Despite this repetitiveness, my preference is to keep these stories, as they were originally told, because, I feel that, each story is a unique little piece of thread, woven into the tapestry, weaving a picture that shows us what life was like for them, as remembered and as lived by these individual folk and should be preserved in this way.

So, you will still read more stories about the many 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 early school memories, of the Beresford Sqare Market and of the folk who worked in 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
2010.

Quotes concerning past memories;

"A land without ruins is a land without memories -- a land without memories is a land without history."

Ryan, Abram Joseph

"It is said that God gave us memory so we could have roses in winter. But it is also true that without memory we could not have self in any season. The more memories you have, the more you have. That is why, as Swift said, "No wise man ever wished to be younger."

George F. Will

"You are told a lot about your education, but some beautiful, sacred memory, preserved since childhood, is perhaps the best education of all. If a man carries many such memories into life with him, he is saved for the rest of his days. And even if only one good memory is left in our hearts, it may also be the instrument of our salvation one day."

Fyodor Dostoevsky,

"Yesterday is but today's memory, and tomorrow is today's dream."

Kahlil Gibran,

"Our hopes are but memories reversed."

Source Unknown,

"The palest ink lasts longer than the most retentive memory."

Chinese Proverb,

"Memory is the diary that we all carry about with us."

Oscar Wilde,

"For us, the best time is always yesterday."

Tatyana Tolstaya,

"O, call back yesterday, bid time return."

William Shakespeare, On Time and Time.

"The Past, the dark unfathomed retrospect! The teeming gulf, the sleepers and the shadows! The past! the infinite greatness of the past! For what is the present after all but a growth out of the past?"

Walt Whitman,

"Don't brood on the past, but don't forget it either."

Thomas H. Raddal,

"We do not remember days, we remember moments. The richness of life lies in memories we have forgotten."

Cellarer Pavese,

"Recollection is the only paradise from which we cannot be turned out."

Jean Paul Richter,

Preface....7
Introduction....15
Acknowledgements....18
A Day At The Seaside....19
Diane Hagan nee Plater
A Day In The Life Of A Milkman During The War, April 1940....22
Reg Gladwin
A Part Family History....23
Robin Dobson
A Plumstead Girls Memories....27
Lesley Turner (nee Wakeman)
A Tale From The Cemetery....36
Denise Davie
A Terrifying Childhood....37
Mr Hoines
Alf Harley, Gent's Outfitters, Plumstead....39
Mark Weightman
An 'Old Boys' Story....40
Peter Lewington
An Unforgettable Cinema Visit....43
on behalf of Shirley Harris
As I Remember As A Boy In Bomb Alley....44
Roger E Havelock
Belvedere Boy....46
David Crone
Blow The Cough Away....48
Shirley Ascott, nee Gritton
Bombing Along The Thames....49
on behalf of Winifred Bryan
Boyhood Memories Of 26 Brookhill Road, Woolwich....50
Don Wilkinson
Brian (Tucker) Walker's Early Memories....56
Brian (always known as 'Tucker') Walker
Brian Whelan Recalls His Plumstead Childhood Days....60
Childhood Memories....68
WJ Sales

Childhood Memories 1931-1950....73
Beryl Reynolds
Childhood Memories Living In Abbey Wood & Plumstead....76
Kenneth Rowden
Childhood Memories Of London Blitz....80
Doreen Clayson (nee Graham)
Childhood Memories Of War In Woolwich & Plumstead....82
Iris Emily Bryen
Community Life In Woolwich & Plumstead....87
By Iris Allen (nee Bryen)
Coronation Celebrations In Tuam Road,1953....90
Su McArthur (nee Hogben)
Destination Unknown....92
Elizabeth Goodrich
Diane Smith, nee Jones, Remembers....94
Dog Fight Over Woolwich And Plumstead....100
Extracts from stories in the Winter edition of 'Friends Of The Few'.
Early Days....105
Kay Welham.
Early Plumstead Street Celebrations....117
Eglington Road 1st November 1944....123
Extract from the story told by Lorna Chudasama (now Wilkinson) in Common Folk, Volume 1
Entertaining Tales On The Common....127
Diane Smith
Family History Of Michael Edward Radley....129
Michael Edward Radley
Fire Picquet....133
Charles Theobald
First Experience Of War....134
by Derrick Grady
Happy Memories Of A Woolwich Childhood....135
Iris Emily Bryen
Holidays At Allhallows On Sea....139
Lyn Davidson
Home Guards....142
Arthur Brady
Hot Cocoa & Tommy Trinder....143
Rosemary Marler
How Times Have Changed....144
Mary Parnell
It Pays To Be Late....146
on behalf of Margaret Gratton

John Plater's Memories....147
Just A Memory....149
Mark Weightman
Just Another Common Kid....150
Colin Weightman
Keith Joseph Smithers (Joe) Remembers....195
Kerr Family Recollections....197
Bruce & Margaret Kerr (nee Rutter)
Kidbrooke And Shooter's Hill Memories....201
June Ellis (nee Barnes)
Lights Out At Seven....204
on behalf of Maureen Middlemiss
London Blitz, I Was There....205
on behalf of Mrs P Flowers
Looking Back & Hope For The Future....207
Author unknown
Lost In The Fog....209
Leading Aircraft Woman Mary Elizabeth Frost (nee Geddis) - WAAF
Lost Toys....210
Joan Denyer
Lyn Davidson, nee Sales, Remembers....211
Memories From Timbercroft School....215
Trevor Cradduck
Memories Of A Plumstead Common Lad....216
Robert Bob (William) Green
Memories Of The Blitz,Granada Cinema, Woolwich....221
from story, 'Childhood Memories In London And Kent' by Sheila Andrews
Memories Of The War Years, Selling Relics....222
on behalf of Mrs P Flowers
Memories Of VE Day In Frances Street, Woolwich....223
Pat and Tony Fawcett
Mike Hume Family Story 226
Mike Hume
Mike Marsh's Story....232
Mischievous Kids....234
Derek Boswell
Missing Person....235
on behalf of Marrion Cartwright
Morgan's Shop Story, Swingate Lane....236
Dean Lucas
Mother's Anguish....240
Belvedere, Kent

Motorbikes And AMC Works Plumstead....241
Bill Cakebread
My Best Mate Peter Barrett. 1938-1955....246
Mark Weightman
My Common....248
Christopher Martyn
My Dad....253
Linda Vranch (Mrs) nee Ott
My Father John Robert Hume 1898-1944....254
Michael Hume
My Life 1939-1945: Growing Up In Woolwich....264
Dave White 19/6/1930
My Plumstead Childhood Days....266
Alan Edward Phipps
My Riley History In Plumstead....270
Peter Riley-Jordan
My Wartime Childhood....276
Peter Beaumont
Nurse Mary....278
Mary Pollock
Obituary: Charlie Fuller 1919-2004....279
Supplied by Lyn Davidson
Old Father Thames . . And Me....283
Christopher Martyn
Our Anderson Shelter....288
Kathleen Bird
Our Families Earlier Days....289
Bill Stokes (Junior)
Our Family....293
Mark Weightman
Over 60 Years In Plumstead....298
Linda Gilder (nee Joyce)
Pearce Family....304
Derek Boswell
Playing Hookey....306
Written on behalf of Gordon Scott by Bognor Library.
Plumstead Common Shops....307
Christopher Martyn
Plumstead Memories....311
Roy Goodhew
Plumstead Stories From Milly Sheppard....314
on behalf of her son Bob

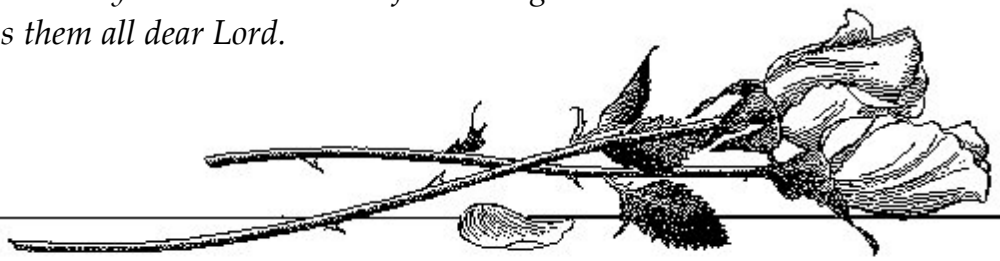
Post-War Teenage Memories Of Plumstead....319
Iris Emily Allen, nee Bryen
Pregnant & Evacuated: Woolwich To Blackpool....324
Unknown mum
Prison Hulks Stories Moored At Woolwich....325
compiled by Lee Jackson
Red Alert At Woolwich Arsenal....330
Winifred Butler
Remembering....331
Kathleen Barbara Smith nee Green, born Hammond
Remembering The Bread Roundsman....340
Derek Boswell
Rosemarie Baghurst, A Few Childhood Memories....343
Rosemarie Baghurst, nee Finch
Saturday 7th Sept. 1940....347
John Matthews
Schools For All....350
School Times Past....352
A look back at some early school photos
Snippets Of The Levett's....366
Terrance John Levett
Some Childhood Possessions....369
Mark Weightman
Some Past Pictures Of Plumstead & Woolwich 370
St Margaret's C of E School, 1950-1956....395
Christopher Martyn
St Margaret's Church, Plumstead Common....403
Christopher Martyn
Stories From Welling....408
on behalf of Peter John Caplin
Surridge Life History Of Brenda May 1924-2005....410
Michael L Hume
Sweet Rations And Hospital....422
Tony White
Symms Family History....423
Karen Francis a great niece to ACH Symms
Ted Atkinson Remembers....429
Beasley Brewery worker
The 8th Woolwich (St Margaret's) Scout Group....437
Christopher Martyn
The Haywards & Ansetts In Plumstead, 1890s–1930s....442
Vic Coughtrey

The Hulks At Woolwich.....447
The Victorian Dictionary compiled by Lee Jackson
The Neve, Picton & Rogers Families.....482
Freda Gibson (Nee Rogers)
The Night Before Christmas.....485
Brian Willoughby
Timbercroft School And Life In The 1940's.....490
Trevor Duncombe
Timbercroft School Days & Others.....494
Roy McPherson
Valerie Daniels, nee Wren, Remembers.....496
Wailing Sirens Over Welling (Kent).....499
Bob Coote b 1932
Wedgebury Childhood Memories.....502
Molly Vaux (nee Wedgebury
Where The VI's Landed In WWII.....504
The Flying Bombs
Woolwich Empire, A Brief History.....515
Facts originated from an article by John Earl

This book is dedicated to all those folk, the ordinary men, women and children, that went away; away to war, to work, to school, or were evacuated, or just went shopping... and never came back...

And also, to all those folk that came back but there was nothing left...

I also dedicate this book to all the ordinary folk that had to endure poverty, who constanly scrimped and saved and went without, in order to get their loved ones some shoes, some clothes, an education, to keep a roof over their head, or to put a daily meal on the table of a evening.
Bless them all dear Lord.



Introduction

As I stated in my first book, *Common Folk, volumes 1 & 2.*

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 8th 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.

Colin, aged five and a half, and younger sister Ann, aged two and a half back garden, 71 Sladedale Road, Plumstead, 1949.

Luckily for me I don't remember the war, only 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.

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, or shoes for the kids.

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.

This small excerpt from *Childhood Memories Of War In Woolwich & Plumstead by Iris Emily*

Bryen, epitimises those difficult times; "*...tragedy was never far away and a school friend of mine was buried in rubble for over half a day when her house was bombed. Rescuers were ordinary people talking to her, asking her to talk back. She told the men that her mum and grandmother were with her but that they weren't answering her. She didn't know that they were both dead."* There are a few other similar stories in this book.

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 live in New Zealand and Bert lives 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?"

My first book slowly evolved and eventually grew into a huge, two volume set entitled, '*Common Folk'*, which was originally in two separate large volumes 1 & 2. I later changed the two separate volumes into one larger book, mainly so that it remained as one book for convenience sake in, perhaps, a library or book shop situation, where the two copies might stray from each other. 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 hoped, would capture some aspects of life; that told something of this unique and so rich social history, especially, 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. So, had I not been able to do this, these stories would have also passed on, along with the folk, unrecorded, stories that would have then been lost forever.

I have extended the areas covered in my last book to include areas that border the Plumstead and Woolwich districts. Areas we perhaps went to school in, where we played in woods, parks or shopped, areas that we interrelated with that overlapped our own areas.

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 combined some of my own stories from volumes 1 & 2 of *Common Folk* and condensed them into one story for this volume, which again, I hope, gives an insight from a young boys perspective, of some aspects of life in those early years, of just after WWII to mid 1950's.

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, as folk have confessed they have, whilst reading my previous two volumes.

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
Or email:
ceedub@pcowley.my-net-space.net

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 which he is constantly maintaining and upgrading.)

I am also very indebted to Wayne Simpson for his kind help in proof reading the book and for his valuable suggestions when I was again weakening somewhat with the huge task.

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

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.

**heritage.centre@greenwich.gov.uk*

A Day At The Seaside

Diane Hagan nee Plater

Southend-on-Sea was a traditional venue for Londoners to enjoy a day out at the seaside.

My aunt, Doris Denman (nee Vinton), has shared a few recollections with me. Doris recalls going to Southend with her parents, Flo and Bill Vinton and two of her sisters (Lily & Ethel).

Diane enjoying the seaside.

They used to catch a tram from their home in Plumstead to Woolwich Ferry, then they would go on the ferry to North Woolwich, where they would catch the 101 bus to East Ham Station, which took them to Southend by train.

The fare in the mid nineteen twenties was apparently 1/6d. return. The older girls would build sandcastles on the beach for Doris, while Bill and Flo enjoyed some refreshment at the 'The Ivy' on the esplanade. Doris remembers being given biscuits and an ice lolly to enjoy while on the beach. Here, in the photo, you can see Lily, (my mother) on the left, aged around 17, Doris is aged about three or four years and Ethel, who would have been about 19, (their four surviving siblings were not present on that day). This photo was taken around 1926. The girls were seated on top of a boat ramp on wheels, so it could be pushed up and down the beach as the tides rose and fell, so as to let the passengers on and off the little pleasure boats that frequented Southend.

Lily, Doris & Ethel at Southend 1926.

My own recollections

When I was a child, a day at the seaside was a treat to be looked forward to with great excitement, although sometimes a trip was quite an impromptu decision, made on the day, much to our surprise and delight. I recall when we went to Southend (from our home in Plumstead) on the tram to the Woolwich Ferry and then the steam train trip to get there. I recently came across an old postcard of the beach at Southend-on Sea, from around the time of my early memories.

The sight of people depicted huddled in deckchairs in their coats in the picture is very much as I remember Southend, as often the weather would turn out to be quite cold and wet, but that did not detract from our enjoyment of our day out. My most vivid memory of these outings was of the very long walk along the pier, which seemed to me, as a small child, to stretch into infinity. I can also remember being very scared by the sight of the sea under the pier, when viewed through gaps of the pier's walkway.

Dad and my brothers, Alan, 12 and John, 10, on the Southend Pier c1950.

Poor old dad (Albert Plater) ended up carrying my bucket and spade (seen here on Southend pier with my brothers Alan and John, who at the time of the photo, would have been about 12 and 10.

Me in the sea. c1950.

There were other equally enjoyable seaside destinations in the south east too, although some were too far to go for just a day trip. I can remember the trips to Margate, Jaywick Sands, the Isle of Wight and Mudeford, sometimes going by a train and

sometimes by charabanc. I remember the excitement of getting prepared for these trips and mum being very busy in the kitchen beforehand, making all the sandwiches and the drink for the long journey, with all the children and the grown-ups to be fed. I can also remember returning home to our little terraced house in Glyndon Road in Plumstead at the end of the long, long day, feeling happy and contented, but oh so tired and just wanting to tumble into my bed.

Above and below photos: Mum, John, Alan and me at Folkstone beach c.1952.

At some point my parents later discovered Folkestone and this became a family favourite for our seaside trips, until 1953 when we actually settled in Folkestone and from then on had a day on the beach whenever we wanted one. We also had plenty of visits from the large extended family we had left behind in Plumstead and Eltham. After all, they still wanted their trip away for a day at the seaside.

See story: My Early Years In Plumstead. Vol 2 Common Folk.

A Day In The Life Of A Milkman During The War, April 1940

Reg Gladwin

Day as usual, Reg at work in Woolwich (North) delivering his milk in the dock area, putting out fires; dodging bombs and keeping his customers happy.

Home for dinner and a kip and to hear all about the dogfights overhead while he has been working.

Queuing was not for Olive. She got all the shopping in when Jerry was overhead. Dangerous but convenient.

Micky was mine until teatime unless the windows were blown in again. Having to rise early it was usually early to bed.

Owing to the activities of Jerry, bed was in the lounge and upstairs was a no-go area. Micky was put in the cot covered by a large floor mat (just in case) and was usually sound asleep by 8.30pm.

It had been a bad day. Jerry was over every hour and with the sirens and a few odd bombs falling we were glad to say 'Bless 'em all' and get to bed. At about 10pm things were livening up. Sirens wailing, planes overhead, anti aircraft guns blazing away in Danson Park just yards away. Air-raid wardens telling us in no uncertain terms to put our lights out. Just another night. Perfect peace!

Olive and Reg cuddled up and Micky snoring his little head off in the cot. Bang, crash and wallop, the windows were blown in and our friendly warden's head poked through the window to check we were all right.

Reg took a quick look. Olive was OK — looked as lovely as ever. Went over to Micky's cot. Lots of broken glass about — even sticking out of the wall. Then leaning forward noticed that the struts of Micky's cot were non existent, with large pieces of glass protruding. They had saved his life. He was still asleep, so cuddled up in the main bed with mum and dad. He still finds he gets a bit sleepy at 8.00pm.

Up next morning at 5.00am ready for another days hard graft and unforeseen adventures. Feels a bit draughty getting on my underpants and vest. Blimey, we have got no windows! so I decide to get dressed in the passage but the side of the house is down. Must have been a big one and what's that great hole in the road about 30 yards away?

Check the neighbours are all alive and kicking. Get my breakfast by pinching the last egg — no more for a fortnight. Out comes my bike and I'm ready for the off. Big kiss for our lovely lad and his mum.

Why do I have to leave 'em in such a state? But we are still all alive and breathing.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

A Part Family History

Robin Dobson

My mother and I used to visit aunt Flo and uncle Jack who was my fathers brother) at Falconwood. Aunt Flo was Italian, though I didn't know that at the time. In the summer they sold ice cream and in the winter they sold hot chestnuts in London. One of the brothers was interned by the British during the war and another brother brother was fighting in the army.

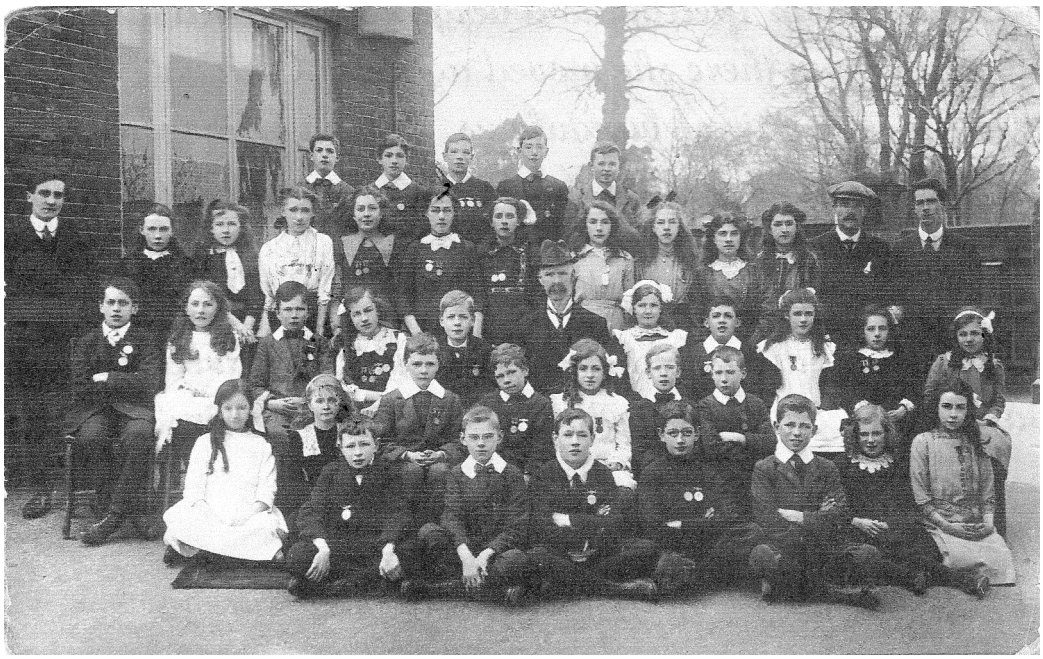
Lucibello family 1930.

Turning to my mother's side of the family, her father, my grandfather, was a military man for most of his life, William Cecil Bottomley, born 1885 in Bermondsey and died aged 67. He was buried with full military honours, complete with a Union Jack draped over his coffin and was carried on a gun carriage from St Stephen's Catholic Church, Welling, (which was the same church attached to my school) to the cemetery at Plumstead. As a boy he went to South Africa at the time of the Boer War.

My mother, Evelyn Ethel Bottomley.

The certificate of discharge from the Royal Engineers showed that he had served in the 9th Lancers and his date of discharge was 13th August 1920.

Later in life and from what I can remember, he worked in Woolwich, as a batman to the officers based in the Arsenal. Grandmother's name was Ethel. Her father's name was Alfred Foot and during his working life he was an engine driver. He died in the Woolwich War Memorial Hospital the day after being hit by a motor car when he was aged 74. He had gone out for a shave and it was a rainy Saturday night at 7 pm. It was claimed that the car was doing 20 miles an hour and its windscreen wipers were working and the driver had sounded his horn.



My father, Albert Edward Dobson, at a Plumstead school (we think possibly Conway) and as he was born in 1902 this must be about 1907/8 period. He is seated in second row from front, 2nd from right.

Granddad and grandma between them had a large family of nine children.

William Cecil Bottomley and Ethel, my grandparents.

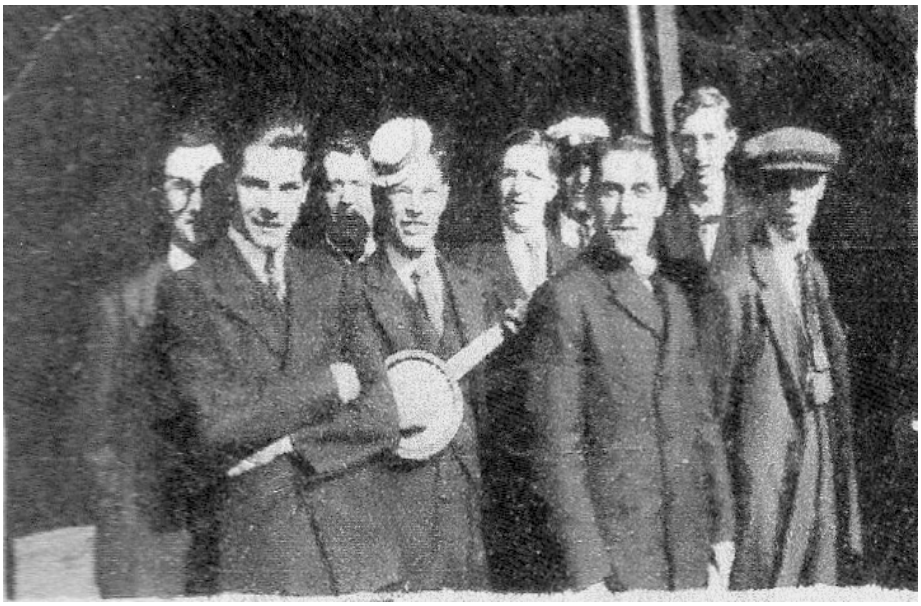
I can recall tales that my mother told me of her hiding with her mother, Ethel, in the chicken run, when grandfather came home drunk from the pub, in fear of their lives, as when he was drunk he was not nice to know. I recall speaking to my cousin Nina, who although was 77, still remembered that he was a 'nasty man' and very frightening, She said that, "He was always painting his chicken shed and he also insisted that he painted her bike, even though she did not want it painted." Prior to living at Birch Grove, my parents lived with their parents in Marmadon Road in Plumstead. The Bottomley's, my mother's family, lived at number 125, which consisted of my grandparents and their nine children. The houses were terraced and had three bedrooms and an outside toilet. The gardens backed onto the Southern Railway line. The church of St Nicholas, complete with the school, was nearby.

The seven Dobson boys; Alfred; Jack; Stan; George; Albert (dad); Cyril and Arthur.

The Dobson's lived in their tiny terraced house, next door, consisting granddad George and grandma Florence, with their seven boys. The boys were; my

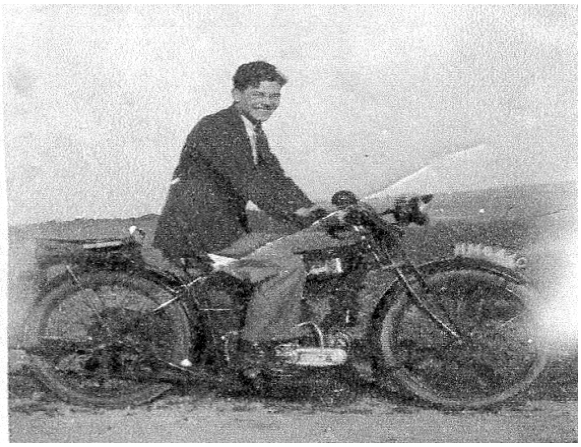
father; Albert Edward; Cyril Gordon James; Arthur Leonard; John Gilmore (Jack); Stanley; Stephen George and Arthur. You can imagine the crush there was with nine children and the house next door with another seven boys. The street had many other children living in it, as large families were quite common in those days. There was a 'good' end of the street and a 'bad' end.

Dad in the United Glass Bottle manufacturers (U.G.B.) home guard during WWII.

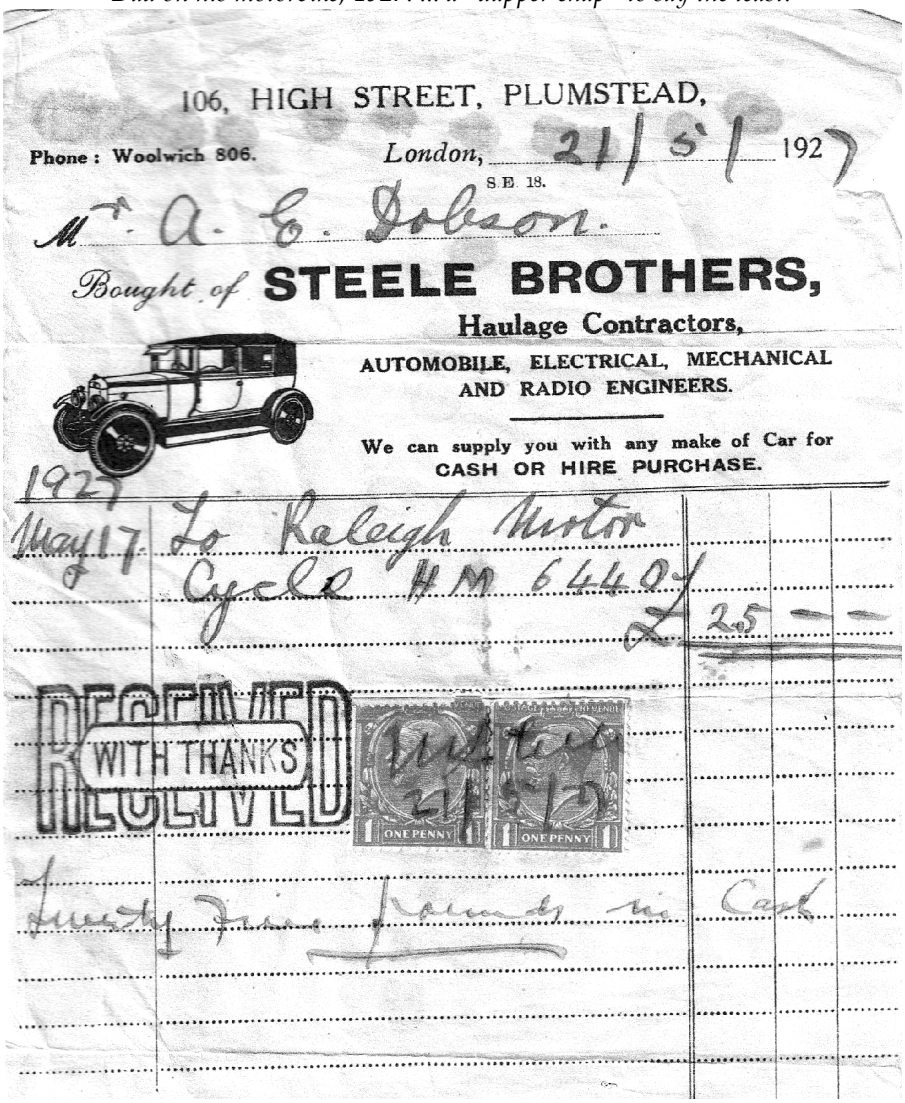


My dad worked most of his life at the United Glass Bottle Manufacturers and this is him in the U.G.B. home guard during the war.

The band (my dad is the one with the mandolin banjo and hat) and guessing he was about 22 so year about 1924.



Dad on his motorbike, 1927. ... a "dapper chap" to say the least.



106, HIGH STREET, PLUMSTEAD,

Phone : Woolwich 806.

London, 21/5/1927

S.E. 18.

Mr. A. E. Dobson.

Bought of **STEELE BROTHERS,**

Haulage Contractors,

AUTOMOBILE, ELECTRICAL, MECHANICAL AND RADIO ENGINEERS.

We can supply you with any make of Car for CASH OR HIRE PURCHASE.

1927

May 17 To Raleigh Motor Cycle HM 6440 £25 - -

RECEIVED WITH THANKS

Twenty Five Pounds in Cash

A receipt for his motorcycle, dated 1927.

A Plumstead Girls Memories

Lesley Turner (nee Wakeman)

Plumstead, London SE18.

I was born 14th March 1945, the last of six children. We lived in a two up, two down house in Earl Rise.

My fathers life consisted of drink, drink and more drink and other women, Mum rarely got any money out of him, she worked so hard, not only going out to work but always made her children's clothes, sewing, knitting, adding bits on when they got too short. My father had a limp; I very rarely saw him when I was growing up. One day when I was about four years old, I saw a man come walking down the road, he had a limp, so I went running up to him calling him daddy only to be advised 'Sorry love I ain't your dad'. So you see, we were very hard up. I also learnt from a very early stage that I had another brother, the woman called him John; my father wouldn't pay her maintenance so she told him to take the boy. He told my mother what had happened; not sure how long after he had been born, he then told my mother that he wasn't going to pay maintenance for him and that he would have to bring him to her to bring him up. By this time I think my mum only had Pat and Jim, the two eldest, needless to say mum refused. I don't know what happened to the boy, I really felt sorry for him. My father never knew that I knew about the boy. I was in my teens by the time I spoke to my mother about it.

Life in the 40's.....well, my eldest sister was married shortly after the war, so I remember my two other sisters and I slept top and tail in a bed in my parents bedroom. My sister, her husband and their baby boy had the back bedroom, my granddad and two brothers had the front room down stairs. Main assembly room was the living room, off the living room was the scullery, no bathroom, no hot water and an outside toilet. I can remember when I was about two years old and being bathed in the butler sink in the kitchen with Lifebuoy soap. Later it was Sunday nights, when the old tin bath was brought in and the water heated up in the boiler. Mum would light the oven to make it warm for us.

I remember Sunday teatime was a wonderful feast; I think it was meant to last us the week. Mum baked on Sundays; fruit cake, butterfly cakes, jam tarts, Victoria sponge, jelly and blancmange, celery, paste sandwiches, shrimps and cockles. We all sat round the table, the one meal time we did, the table made longer by a 'leaf pull out' in the middle of it. The younger children sat on the paster board stretched across between two plaster horses, as I called them, everyone else had a chair of a kind.

I went to Earl Rise Primary School. I started in the nursery when I was four. I remember we had to put our hands together and do 'Here's the church, here's the steeple, open the door and here's the people. (wiggling our fingers representing 'the people')

Mum used to work in Yorkies Café which was on the Bridge in Plumstead High Street. They were very kind people; Greek Cypriots, and I sometimes used to go down there and I would clear the tables for mum and make myself useful. I always was showered with drinks, cakes, dinners, whatever I wanted. I was probably around seven or eight years of age. Jimmy, the owner, always called me 'Hey Blondie'. The cafe was in a prime location for the bus drivers

and their clippies who used to park the buses round by Plumstead Railway Station. We were always given tickets by them to go to the Christmas party they held every year; that was very special.

Earl Rise Nursery School learning to do "Here is the church, here is the steeple...".I am on the right hand side with the pigtails (plaits).top row, Danny Dalton, Valerie Frost, Colin Hephren, Second row, Gaynor Goldsmith, Trevor?, Kay Connors, Jeffrey Lewis, Patrick Coulter, Graham Ashley. Front Row, Pamela Hopgood, Deiter Trogan and Vicky Knap. 1952/53?

EARL RISE.

We always played out in the street, you could in those days; hopscotch, marbles and whatever your mind invented. Half way down the road, where Glyndon Road cut across, there was the Park Estate Tavern on one corner, Cannon's Paper Shop on the other corner; the third corner was a little laundry and on the fourth corner lived Mr and Mrs Moore. To the top of the road, Earl Rise School on the left hand side. Two thirds of the way down was the gutted remains of St Johns Church, which was hit by an Incendiary bomb in the 2nd W.W. This was a great place to play, getting over the wall, and really exploring the ruins; some of the older kids used to frighten us smaller ones by telling us it was haunted, saying that someone was stabbed there and then they'd run off and leave us. This would have been around 1952/3.

In March 1953, a search was on for the murderer John Reginald Christy (10 Rillington Place) and poor Mr Cannon, who looked so much like him, was arrested, soon released. (He owned the paper shop) That was the talk of the road for some time. Round the corner in Glyndon Road where Elmley Street ran across, on the four corners there were shops, the News shop where Joan and her mum lived and worked; they always let you have sweets on next weeks coupons; opposite them was Usherwood's, the general grocer shop where I always went on a message for my mum, starting out by repeating the order,"2lbs sugar and 1/4 lb tea", I always got to say instead, "2lb tea and 1/4 sugar". Opposite, on the other corner, was the greengrocers Wisdoms, and on the fourth corner was Naylor's a little everything store. Naylor's also owned the little fish and chip shop in Elmley Street, where they wrapped your order up in newspaper.

Up on the verandah of the maisonette my parents moved into, still in Earl Rise. You can see the Park Estate Tavern. (1967)

My parents with one of my nephews, Andrew, outside the house where I was brought up. (1961/2)

My nephew Andrew, aged two. at the top of the road was the school. (1961/2)

Me and Brian my brother in law. Lower part of Earl Rise in the background. (1963)

On a Charabanc outing to Margate, I remember seeing the sea for the first time and seeing all the people running back and forth dodging the waves, it scared me, but I was only 2 ½.

I would go to Beresford Market (The Square) with my granddad. All the stall holders knew him; they called him Mac for some reason. I was very small probably about four years old. Granddad would only use the trams for transport; sometimes it seemed we waited for ever. When I got older I would meet my mum when she finished work and we would either go to Lakedale for the shopping or to Woolwich.

The charabanc outing to Margate.

My granddad, always called me chick. He taught me how to box. He always took me up to the Post Office in Walmer Terrace on Tuesdays to get his pension, I knew I was going to get sweets from Boney's the little sweet shop. I remember that next to there was a Haberdashery and then a cobblers. Further along the road was quite a few shops, one being Werner's the Bakers, the Chelsea buns were the best I ever tasted. If I remember right they were German,

but I think they had been there years.

My friends prior to school were Danny Dalton; sadly he passed away a while back, then there was Kay Connors, who lived just around the corner. Danny taught me how to play marbles and conkers, with Kay it was girlie things. The one thing I have saved all these years is a tin of beads we used to collect, they look terrible but I can't throw them away.

We often played on Plumstead Common. Ahh... the Common, where so many of us kids used our imaginations and played happily for so many hours and often we would have our picnics there on nice sunny days.

Us kids on the common, Pat and Danny Dalton to the left, my sisters Margie and Val and myself to the right.

We also played on the Woolwich Ferry, going over on the boat and walking under the foot tunnel back we would spend hours doing this; sometimes we would go to the park on the north side of the tunnel, play on the swings and roundabouts. We would go up to the Globe cinema, which was in the dip on Plumstead Common Road, now a small block of flats.

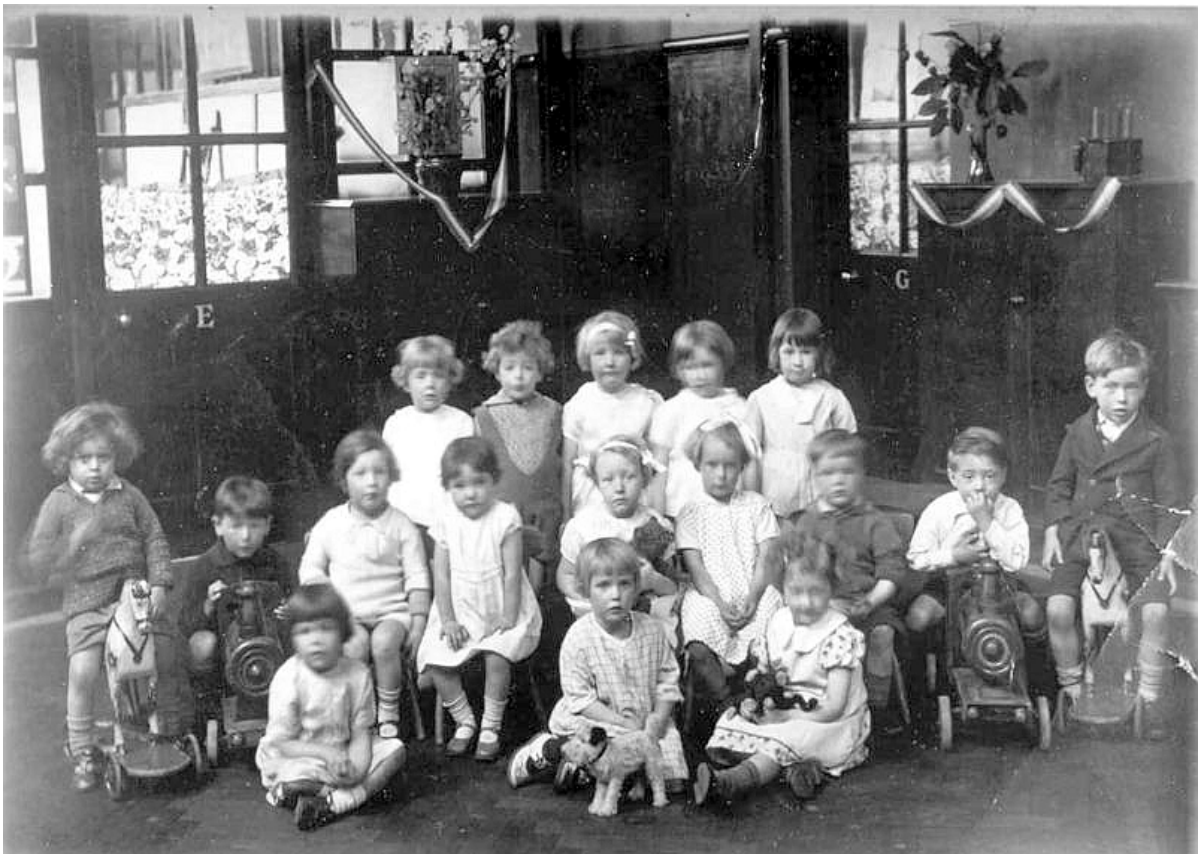
Earl Rise also had a street party for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Mum made these two huge cakes with a little coach and horses for decoration; dad got the scaffolding for the stage. It was fancy dress and with not much money. Mum made Val, my sister, a dress from crepe paper, this was to celebrate 'Mothers Busy Day'. A frill was put around her head with a doily attached on top; she has a necklace of cotton reels, a tray was fastened round her neck with a little tea pot, cup, saucer and spoon plus a little plate on it. All over the dress there was things like knitting needles and wool, pegs were all round the bottom with dress patterns fixed on to it. I was very similar but I was 'Mothers Day' with a cardboard coronet with rosebuds attached, Mothers Day cards were stuck all over the dress. Val won first prize, I didn't come anywhere. I still have a couple of the cups and one saucer we were given.

Earl Rise Coronation Street Party, 1953.
? Bassett, Roger Cannon, Danny Dalton, ?, ? Gaywood, Valerie Hobbs, ? Mornington. Hazel Risby, Valerie Wakeman, ?, Colin Hephren.....

Lesley Wakeman.

Lesley and Valerie Wakeman with Hazel Risby. 1953.

Above photos at the Earl Rise Coronation Street Party, 1953.
Photos: Lesley Turner (nee Wakeman).

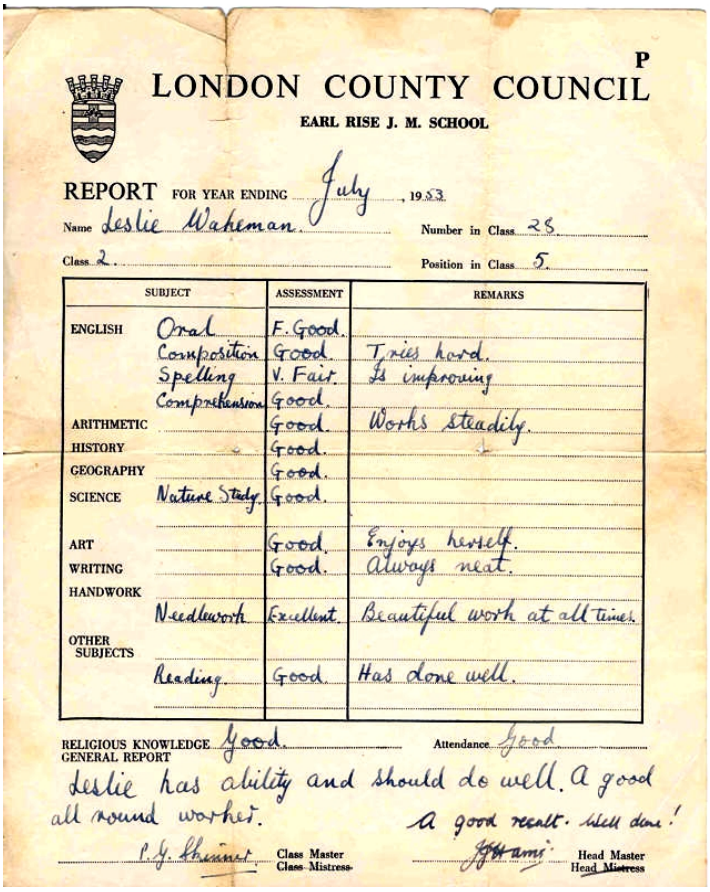


The little boy sitting on the toy horse was my Brother Jim (sadly died in 1993) he was probably four years of age, taken in 1935, the decorations I assume were for King George 5th's Jubilee.

Earl Rise School Football Team. Some of the names: Patrick Coulter, Tony Murphy, Harold Littlewood, Jeffrey Lewis, Trevor ?, Graham Asley, Ronnie Etherington, Danny Clenshaw, and Danny Dalton. 1955-56.

Neighbours in our garden at 64 Earl Rise: Mrs Luker, Mrs MacDonald (sitting) my sister Margie, Wendy and Peter Luker and myself. Taken in about 1951.

Waverley Girls School Netball Team: Back row: Jackie Woods, Ina Smith, Kay Mallen, Brenda Smith, Carol Page, Gloria Wright and Dorothy Sullivan.
Front row: Jackie Tanner, Gillian Shepherd, PaulineWoods, Lesley Wakeman, Jill Mabbot, Sandra McCloud and Margaret Parsfield. 1958?



P

LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL

EARL RISE J. M. SCHOOL

REPORT FOR YEAR ENDING July, 1953

Name Leslie Waheman. Number in Class 28.

Class 2. Position in Class 5.

SUBJECT		ASSESSMENT	REMARKS
ENGLISH	Oral	F. Good.	
	Composition	Good.	Tries hard.
	Spelling	V. Fair.	Is improving
	Comprehension	Good.	
ARITHMETIC		Good.	Works steadily.
HISTORY		Good.	
GEOGRAPHY		Good.	
SCIENCE	Nature Study.	Good.	
ART		Good.	Enjoys herself.
WRITING		Good.	Always neat.
HANDWORK			
	Needlework	Excellent.	Beautiful work at all times.
OTHER SUBJECTS			
	Reading.	Good.	Has done well.

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE Good. Attendance Good

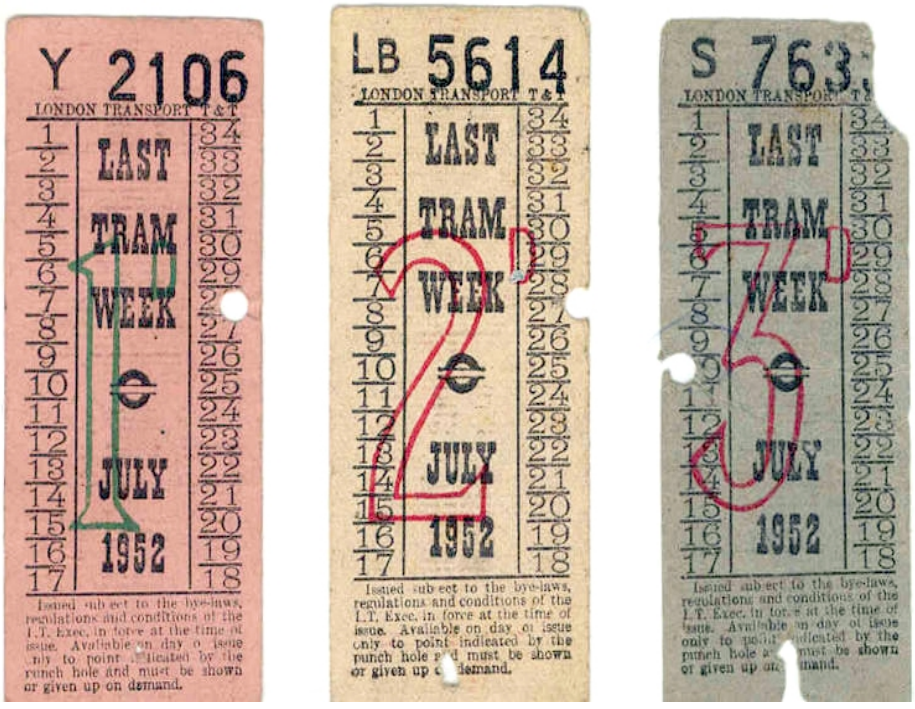
GENERAL REPORT

Leslie has ability and should do well. A good all round worker. A good result. Well done!

P. G. Skinner Class Master Class Mistress

J. Hami Head Master Head Mistress

My school report July 1953.



Last week of the Tram Tickets, July 1952.

A Tale From The Cemetery

Denise Davie

As a small child in the early 1940's, I was making a visit to my grandmothers grave in a South East London cemetery with my mother and two aunts, both of whom had small children, one still in a pram.

The lane leading to the cemetery was long and lined with gorse bushes, with only a couple of houses near the cemetery gates.

As we approached these gates, we heard the dreaded drone of a doodlebug and, with nowhere to take cover, one of my aunts ran to one of the houses hoping to seek shelter for us all, but there was no answer to her frantic knocking and calling.

In a blind panic we ran into the cemetery where two men, who were digging a grave, called out to us. They bundled us all under their van and lay on top of us to protect us, then we heard the doodlebug cut out followed by the explosion.

As the men helped us out from under the van, one of them muttered, 'Bloody stupid Germans - bombing a cemetery!'

As our hearts stopped thumping, we resumed our visit to the grave but when we retraced our steps back through the gates to go home, we saw the houses where we had sought shelter had been flattened.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

A Terrifying Childhood

Mr Hoines

I lived in Abbey Wood, its about 2-3 miles from Woolwich Arsenal. I was born in 1938 and the Battle of Britain started 10 July 1940, the day my sister was born. That day, a bomb fell 30 yards from my house and blew the side of the house out next door to us and cracked our house in half. I was tossed out of bed. I wasn't quite two then, but I remember that.

When the German bombers came over, I was so scared - my heart was beating. Hiding under the bedclothes, I was terrified. That cast a shadow over the rest of my life. I felt completely isolated. Many years later when I was working as a civil engineer and blasting some rock to build a bypass, all these fearful memories came back to me. It truly blighted my life.

When the bomb went bang it was a terrific bang and then it seemed to be quiet. That's how my life's been.

There was a Radar station and a gun battery, about a mile away. They were firing at the Luftwaffe as it came up the Thames to bomb any buildings or any air fields, that sort of thing. There was an RAF station with barrage balloons about 500 yards away. Of course the Germans were trying to knock that out. We were in the thick of things.

We were evacuated in February 1941 to a place called Lickey End (Worcestershire). I only remember the name because my mother said Lickey End seemed a very unusual name. We went away one day in a steam train and my sister was crying my mother tells me (I don't remember). When we got to Lickey End, my sister went to a hospital there as an emergency. A day later she died of meningitis. There was an outbreak of meningitis at the time.

Following 2-3 days in Lickey End, our family (including dad who came up from Woolwich) went to Keithley in Yorkshire, where both my parents came from. We stayed with family, but my uncle kicked my older brother under the table (the story was told over the years) and I think I was abused also.

There was no continuity to life. We only stayed a day or two in Keithley, then came home. We'd sooner face the bombs than the family.

We came back to London and stayed together as a family. My father worked as a Sanitary Inspector and issued Ration Books from the local public house following bombing raids, when people had lost all their possessions. He also helped the police over black market racketeering. I remember, towards the end of the war, the doodlebugs coming over. They were aimed at London and the Woolwich Arsenal, where munitions were made and stored. There were always sorties coming up for the Arsenal.

I do remember going to school and singing 'ten green bottles'. The fire brigade kept their vehicles in the playground and also a pig pen with about 20 white pigs. They were the cleanest pigs I've ever seen. They were hosed out every day. I used to talk to them - they were very intelligent.

The V2 rocket came towards the end of the war. You got a double bang - pressure waves from going through the sound barrier. They'd hit the ground first, with no warning, then they'd explode and you'd see the light from the explosion and then you'd hear the sonic

boom.

I was looking out of the lounge in my house and I said to my mother 'what is that steel post doing there?' and she said 'It's a lamp-post son.' And then she said 'when the lamp comes on the war will be over'. And one day I looked out and the lamp was on.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

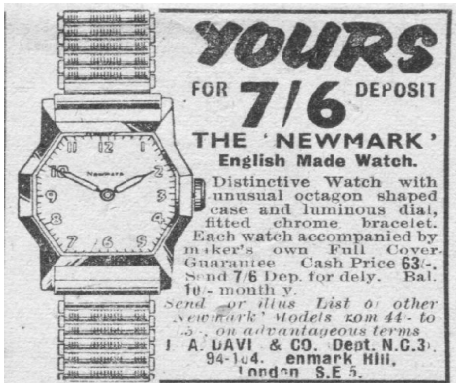
Alf Harley, Gent's Outfitters, Plumstead

Mark Weightman

As a teenage male in Plumstead, if you wanted to impress, as 'lads-about-town' you had to dress to look the part. This meant, that if you had the the dosh, you visited Alf Harley gent's outfitters. The shop was situated very close to Plumstead Bridge Railway Station and Alf, who was Jewish, was a very amiable man, never without a smile on his face. This was possibly because his small, but well stocked premises, always seemed to be never without customers. You'd often get a 'free' pair of socks after buying a garment or such like item from him. Alf Harley was of course, a very shrewd man and, not to be disrespectful, he could have doubled in looks for Al Capone. At one stage his shop window carried a very large photograph of the boxing twins, Jim and Henry Cooper, both were decked out in, supposedly, Alf's suits, but perhaps with bespoke tailor, Harry Lee, just around the corner, opposite Plumstead Station entrance; could it have been Harry Lee who actually made their suits? I don't think that Alf Harley was a cutter. The suits Alf sold arrived in his shop ready made. I worked near to the Old Mill Pub for a brief period and I was pleased that my reputation had got around Plumstead because, for the short spell I was there, Alf Harley was one of my regular customers for his trim and a Shampoo. Years later when I met him again, Alf remembered my best friend Peter Barrett and our other mates and myself as his customers in his outfitters. I recall once that I had just bought some fish and chips from the Chippie almost next to his outfitters. I was sitting astride my new Triumph Tiger 100 and Alf approached me having only just locked his shop up. I noticed he was not very happy because, apparently, the owner of the barber/confectionery shop in the Old Mill area had refused Alf a fixed morning appointment with me for his trim and shampoo. Mr Warner, the owner, had told Alf that he should wait his turn and queue like everyone else. Alf said to me "Your boss will never be anything more than he is". I noticed that whilst Alf was talking to me about this, he was smiling and looking at his reflection in a shop window, as he was wearing a very stylish hat, a Borsalino. Alf was indeed a character.

In that compact outfitters of his, he employed at least two assistants, one of whom travelled every day all the way from Southend, in Essex – can you believe.

Yes memories. We all liked Alf Harley. Oh, and by the way, these days I too have a Borsalino hat.



An 'Old Boys' Story

Peter Lewington

Me aged about six.

I was almost 6 when the war started. My birthday is 12th September, 1933. I lived in a semi-detached house with my parents and my sister, who is five years older than I, in Welling, Kent. We had only moved to this house in 1937 from Deptford, which at the time was one of the docks of London. That area was really devastated during the blitz. I can just remember the "Day War Broke Out", the siren sounded after the announcement on the radio and we went and sat under the stairs. I have not got many memories of the "Phoney War" except for the digging of a large hole in the garden by my father for the Anderson Shelter. My father made it really safe by building a blast wall at the front and covering it thickly with soil and then on top of this a tarpaulin sheet. Inside it had bunks for the four of us and mother made it quite cosy. My father was then aged 34 and worked as a crane driver in a timber yard in Canning Town. He was not called up for the armed services, instead he joined the LDV, which later became the Home Guard. More of this later. My mother had not gone out to work since before she was married, now she was working at the Woolwich Arsenal. I think her job was mainly filling shells, so my sister and I had to fend for ourselves for most of the day.

When the Battle of Britain started it was thrilling to watch our fighters go into action. I was of course at that age, ignorant of the fact that people were being killed and injured as I watched.

The Blitz was a different story. Air-raids day and night. Sleeping in the shelter on most nights. There was of course the great fun for us children of collecting shrapnel and anything else that fell out of the sky. During this time my mother and our house had a lucky escape; an incendiary bomb crashed through the roof of our kitchen while my mother was in it, it bounced off the draining board and out of the open door into the back garden. My mother sustained some small burns to her arm but was otherwise all right. The bomb, after it was put out, became a treasured trophy. I wonder what became of it!

These 'pleasures' ended however when my parents decided that we children should be evacuated.

My father's mother was at this time cook and my aunt Elsie, maid to Lady Salmond (her husband was Sir John, Marshall of the Royal Air Force). Lady Salmond was then living in a large house in Wales with her cousin Clover and Lady Eileen Meade. They generously invited all the relatives of my grandmother and aunt, well not all, just the mothers and

children to stay in the mews flats on their estate.

Getting to Wales during the blitz was no mean feat! We, my father mother and sister started out on the journey to Wales in, I think, November 1940. It was at the height of the blitz. We must have started out in daylight but it was dark for the rest of the journey. I cannot remember how we got to Woolwich but the only transport we could get into central London was a river 'Bus' from there. As we went up river the docks were all in flames, the worst being on the north side. This is one of my most vivid memories! When we got to central London, Westminster I think, we got a lift on a lorry going to Paddington, which was the station for Wales. I sat in front with my mother and sister alongside the driver. My father had to get into the open back with our cases which was a load of tarry stones for road building. Here is another curious memory; when I got down from the cab of the lorry one of my legs had 'gone to sleep', the first time in my short life that this had happened, and I almost fell. I must have slept for the rest of the journey because I have no memory of it.

The part of Wales we went to was like another world. Very few houses, green fields, animals and no air-raids! My father returned home almost immediately; my mother stayed for a while and then she also returned, coming back with my father at Christmas which was made wonderful by Lady Salmond's generosity. I think I was only there for about seven months. As soon as the blitz had decreased, my sister and I were taken back to Welling and our family was reunited once again.

Once back in Welling, life settled into something like normality. School for me and my sister, work for my parents and Home Guard duties for my father. He had to keep his weapons at home; an evil looking home made knuckle-duster with a blade to the front, a bayonet of course and a Lewis Machine Gun with many rounds of ammunition, that was kept under the bed!

Life for a child in the war was on the whole enjoyable, even without sweets. First there were no Park Keepers, so you were able to do things that they would have disapproved of. Policemen were few, mainly "Specials" who were old (about 40, well that seemed ancient to us lads). The bombed houses became great places to play, when they were cleared of rubble, on an housing estate like ours. There had been a land mine fall early in the war opposite our house which had destroyed about eight semi-detached houses. A place to build huts, a place for our 'war games', some got really rough, with stone throwing, luckily no one was hurt, well not badly. It was not built on until quite a long time after the war.

Years went by and the first V-weapons, the Doodle Bug, started to arrive. It was at this time that the Government decided, that the area I lived in, all children under a certain age would have to be evacuated. I was most reluctant to go. It seemed to my mind that the war had just got interesting again. Anyway off I went with a label on my jacket. We were put on a train at Kings Cross, not knowing where we were going. It took about 5 hours to get to Leeds. I finally ended up in a mining village called Allerton Bywater in Yorkshire. This, like Wales was another culture shock. We were all taken to the village hall and then the villagers came and picked the child that they would like to look after. I had a friend with me from Welling and did not want to be parted, but the family who picked me could not take more than one. The family I was billeted with comprised mother, father and two daughters. A son was in the

Air force, a sergeant pilot. More of him later! The father was a miner in the local pit and used to work on shifts, so he would be coming home at different times of the day. They were a very good and kind people and I soon settled in, although I was always missing the 'action' back home. I think I was with this family for about a year or maybe less because when my pleas to come home were finally granted the next phase of the V-weapons had begun, the V2 rockets. To a young boy these were a bit boring, just a bang and whoosh and it was all over, for someone!

While writing this, other memories come flooding back. These are like snap-shots, and do not relate to any particular event; the time when a piece of shrapnel from anti-aircraft guns just missed my head; one of my friends being killed in an air-raid; diving into the shelter, when the engine of a Doodle Bug cut out nearby and hearing the wind whistling on the wings as it only just cleared our garden by perhaps 50 feet; seeing a German aircraft over-head so low that I could see every detail of it's markings. Other memories too numerous to recall here. Soon the war was over and in three years I would be at work. As a postscript to this tale, the family that I was billeted with in Yorkshire came to visit us in Welling after the war. With them came the son who had been in the Air force. He met my sister and on Boxing Day 1947, they were married. He will be 80 this year and my sister is 75. They had two children.

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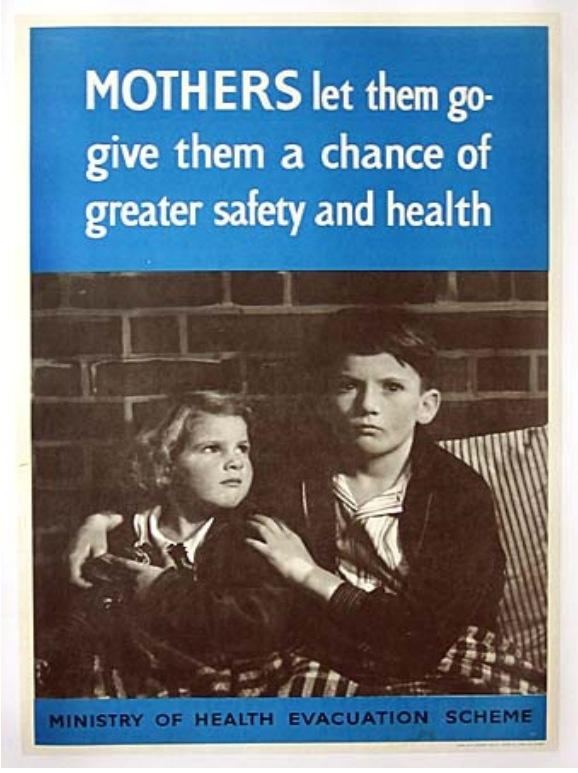

An Unforgettable Cinema Visit

on behalf of Shirley Harris

It was almost certainly a Saturday because my mum, dad and I nearly always went to the pictures on that day; the year was 1941 and I was nine years old. The film showing was "The Bluebird" starring the one and only Shirley Temple and I was so excited!

We travelled to Plumstead (which was next door to Woolwich Arsenal) by the 99 bus and went into the cinema in the early afternoon. The cinema was pretty full and we had just about managed to see the whole programme through when an air raid warning flashed onto the screen, so we made for the nearest exit.

We emerged in the middle of a bombing raid to absolute mayhem — the noise was deafening, the air was full of choking dust and smoke and there was debris all around us. Overhead, German and English fighter planes were battling it out and we could hear the whine of bombs, it was like a scene from hell. My father pushed my mother and I down the steps of the nearest public air-raid shelter, which was full to bursting, and we were allowed to squeeze in but my father was turned away so we became separated. After what seemed like hours, a warden called down to tell us that all clear had sounded and we came out from the bowels of the earth covered in dust to find devastation all around us. Shops and houses were lying in ruins, telegraph poles were strewn across the road, their wires, dangling, buses had been abandoned and all their windows had been blown out so that broken glass and debris littered the roads and pavements. Thankfully, my father had managed to find refuge in another shelter and we were happily reunited after a frantic search. No public transport could operate in those conditions and so we prepared for the long walk home in the direction of Bostall Heath — three miles distant and uphill all the way! We wearily picked our way through all the rubble, up the hill following the road across the Heath and almost at our journey's end, when we were met by an air raid warden. "Where do you live?" he asked, and when we replied "Glenview" he told us we couldn't go home because of an unexploded landmine in our road — we almost collapsed! After more questions, we were finally allowed to enter the sanctuary of home, because Glenview, being a long road and the landmine having dropped at the far end.

We sank into our armchairs and never has a cup of tea been more welcome. Our spirits soon revived and we tuned into the wireless to listen to the reports about the terrible bombing attacks in our area which we had witnessed at first hand. Our earnest prayer was that there would be no more air raids that night but that could in no way be guaranteed and so we prepared ourselves for yet another night in our littler Anderson shelter in the garden.

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As I Remember As A Boy In Bomb Alley

Roger E Havelock

As a boy I lived at 239 Gipsy Road, Welling, bordering Bexleyheath North West Kent.

My earliest memory is that of a Sunday morning in September 1939 at the age of 4, when the family were at Bostall Heath at the junction of Brampton Road and Longleigh Lane watching the tethered Barrage Balloon, when all of a sudden the first air raid warning siren sounded, it was loud and frightening; we rushed home as quick as possible, I was on my blue three wheeler bike. When we arrived home dad placed a mattress against the dinning room windows as the sound of an aircraft could be heard, it was a false alarm as the plane was one of ours.

During the war period I can remember watching with my sister the German bombers being caught in the search lights and of seeing 'dog fights' in the sky between our fighter aircraft and the Germans. Night after night the German bombers came over, their targets being the Woolwich Arsenal and the docks, we were on their bomb run. We had a mongrel bitch dog called Nan, she was mainly black with bits of white on her face. Dad brought her home from work as she was being ill-treated. Before the air raid siren sounded she would bark and warn us of the oncoming raid. We would hear the Ack-Ack guns opening up, first at Danson Park to the south then Shooters Hill to the West and lastly Bostall Woods to the north, all within a few miles of each other. After the raid we would go out looking for pieces of shrapnel from the shells, incendiary bomb fins, material from the parachute of land mines and the silver / black foil strips used to disrupt the Radar. In our part of the road alone we had a 500 LB bomb explode on the houses opposite destroying two pairs of semi detached houses, an oil bomb dropped just a few houses away and many incendiary bombs. At the top of the road fell a parachute mine, two flying bombs, V1's or Doodlebugs as they were called and a V2 rocket, there were quite a few lives lost.

When the bomb dropped opposite our house the main blast passed between our house and that of Mr and Mrs Day next doors which saved our house; the front step was forced under the hallway, most of the windows were broken and roof tiles dislodged. We had to move out so that the bomb damage could be repaired and went to live in a summer type house in a ladies garden at Hullbridge, on the river Wharf in Essex. It was here that my sister and I were machined gunned by a stray German fighter plane as we walked to school. After a few weeks when the repairs had been completed we returned to our house in Welling.

Because of the air raids, which were continuous, my sister and I were evacuated in mid 1944, leaving Bexleyheath station by train for Huddersfield in Yorkshire. I can remember arriving and all of us sitting at long tables eating bread and jam in a hall, then being picked out for billeting, we were at first billeted together but as the place was dirty my sister complained and we were re billeted but in different homes at Lockwood in Huddersfield. My sister went to Mr and Mrs Ellis who had a daughter called Winnie of a similar age, which was a good home, and I went to a Mr and Mrs Flooks who had two sons. Mrs Flooks only wanted the evacuation money and called me a lair when I told her about the air raids at home. I was taken by her son to see a bomb crater in a field near David Brown's factory. Nearby was a

park called Castle Hill, which had the Victoria Tower.

I was not wanted and I disliked the family, so I kept writing home “I want to come home. I want to come home” . After six weeks my mother came to collect me and as we arrived in London the Flying bombs had just started. My sister stayed for a few months before returning. She has kept in touch with the daughter Winnie ever since. During the war and for sometime after, fruit was scarce and so when word got round that our local Greengrocers in Wrotham Road had oranges in stock, all the mum's would queue up outside the shop waiting for it to open. To encourage recycling, jam jars and beer and lemonade bottles were refundable. Large jam jars fetched a penny and the small ones a half penny, the bottles fetched between two and four pence. Sweets were rationed and were hard to find.

When the war ended in Europe, our part of the road, like many others, held a V E Day (Victory over Europe) celebration party. The road was closed off for the day and tables and chairs were put in the middle of the road for the children; the mums made cakes and sandwiches from whatever they could get hold of. Bunting was tied around the lamp posts; anyone who had a flag hung it out and music was played from a gramophone.

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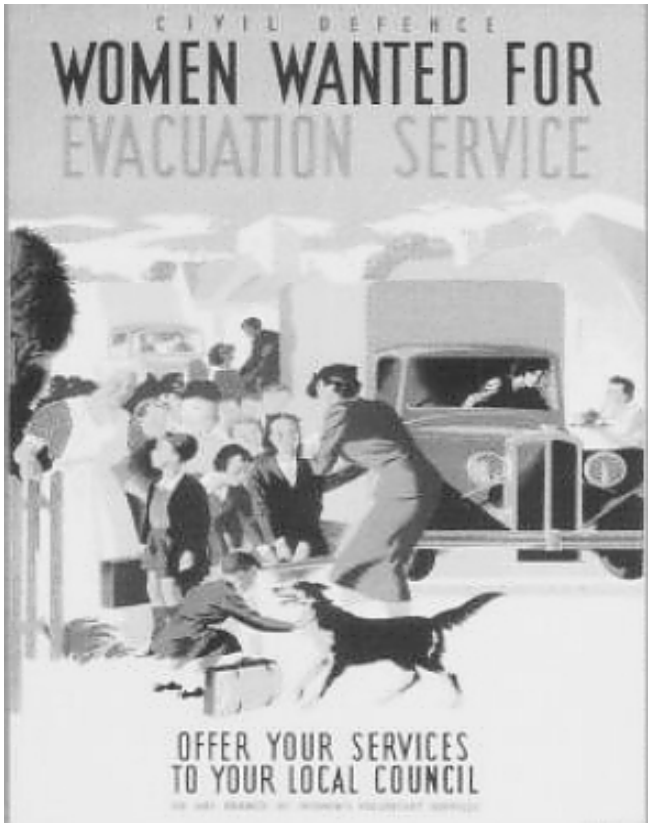

Belvedere Boy

David Crone

At the outbreak of war I was eight, my brother Derek six. We lived in Upper Belvedere and our father worked as a fireman for Callendar Cables. We were in Sunday School when the first siren sounded its wailing note of warning; war had been declared and we were sent home. We wondered what all the fuss was about. We knew that some Anderson shelters had already been assembled and ours was a major feature of my life for the first three years of the war. It was made of corrugated iron, buried half way up with earth, covered with a tarpaulin secured by wooden batons. A blast wall, made from the back of our old piano, was sited about two foot in front of the entrance.. The roof and end door were made of parts of a lorry. We kept emergency rations in there, a 'Beatrice' paraffin stove and a cable from the house to supply light via a transformer. We used to play battleships and do 'French knitting' using a cotton reel with four nails in the end.

One day dad came home from work and told us there were lots of small boats on the river. By standing on a chair and looking down the valley towards the river at Erith, I could see the little boats in the distance. We didn't find out until later that they were going to Dunkirk.

In the early part of 1940 I was at a neighbour's house, reading American comics with a friend. A 'moaning minnie' sounded, but there was no gunfire, so after the all-clear I decided to go home. Our house was about 12 feet above the level of the road. I'd just entered the steps when I heard the sound of an aircraft. Looking up, I saw three bombs leave the plane, a Heinkel I think. One fell 100 yards away, where I had just been. There was a horrendous bang like a thunderclap. I ran up the steps, yelling for mum. Mum, my auntie Daisy and her baby were all lying (unharmed) in the cabbages; they had only got halfway to the shelter.

As a nine year old my friends and I used to collect shrapnel. We kept special pieces but the rest, often still warm, were taken to the police station. The nose cone of a bomb was secured to the wall there. We were told that the shrapnel was sent to Woolwich Arsenal to make new shells.

My auntie Faith had Downs Syndrome and we often used to 'babysit' each other. Our secret stash of coppers used to buy us an ice cream from Dimashio's. Faith used to express her feelings about Hitler very forcibly,'I'd like to get that Hitler and smash his face in!'

As changes began to happen I noticed cars and kerbstones had their edges painted white, and the headlights of cars were masked for the 'blackout'. Mr Bearman was our ARP man. An older man near us refused to black out and someone painted the outside of his windows with tar!

I remember seeing one bombed house completely gone, apart from a fireplace, mantelpiece and picture on the wall.

My younger aunties, with their small children, were evacuated to Sir Reginald Blake's mansion. My brother Derek was billeted with an RAF sergeant in Melksham. Left in Belvedere, my education took place in a nearby house, for one or two hours each week. We spent more time watching the Spitfires from Hornchurch flying low over Belvedere. Years

later I found out they were 603 Squadron from Edinburgh. I served in 603 in the late 50s, but didn't know until later.

Myths and rumours abounded at that time. The Hornchurch Spitfires were rumoured to be underground (actually they were in pens with brick walls either side). Most nine year olds believed that spitfires circled to meet the bombers and inside the circle they were at the mercy of the guns, outside was fighters' territory.

I remember hearing the big a/a guns at Bostall Heath and being assured by my dad they were there to protect me. I also remember a gun with a melodious sound; I think it was called a Chicago piano.

Lots of the riverbank factories were on fire for days on end. My dad got four hours off in 24; he would sleep, be woken up to eat, then go back. Despite all these fires, coal was difficult to come by and I queued for hours to get half a cart.

At 11, I got a place at Erith Grammar School but there was no room, so I was sent to Dartford Grammar School. Around Dartford there were fires on the pavements; two chimneys, about 2 ft high, burned old oil which made smoke to hide the moon's reflection on the river, so it could not be used as a navigation aid.

When we first saw a 'doodlebug' we cheered, thinking it we had shot it down. we soon learned to take cover when the engine stopped.

In 1944, at the time of the V1 and V2 attacks, I was evacuated to Melksham, where I stayed with some lovely people in Beanacre. I had a wonderful experience there.

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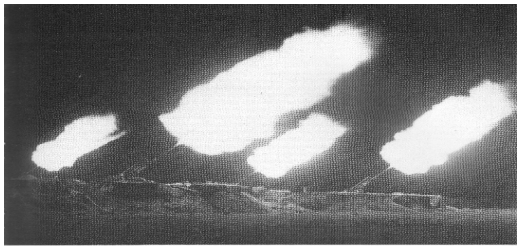

Top: Night time gun barrage. Bottom: Anti aircraft gun unit.

Blow The Cough Away

Shirley Ascott, nee Gritton

When I was about eight or nine years old, I had whooping cough. Someone told my mother an old wives tale that if you went to a hill or a high point, that the wind would blow the cough away!

So she took us up to Shooters Hill, and we stood there for a while. When it got darker, we looked across to the river Thames and we could see that the whole sky was blood red from the Blitz the previous evening.

It seemed like the whole of London was on fire. You could see the docks from up there…

You could see the reflection of the red sky in the river.

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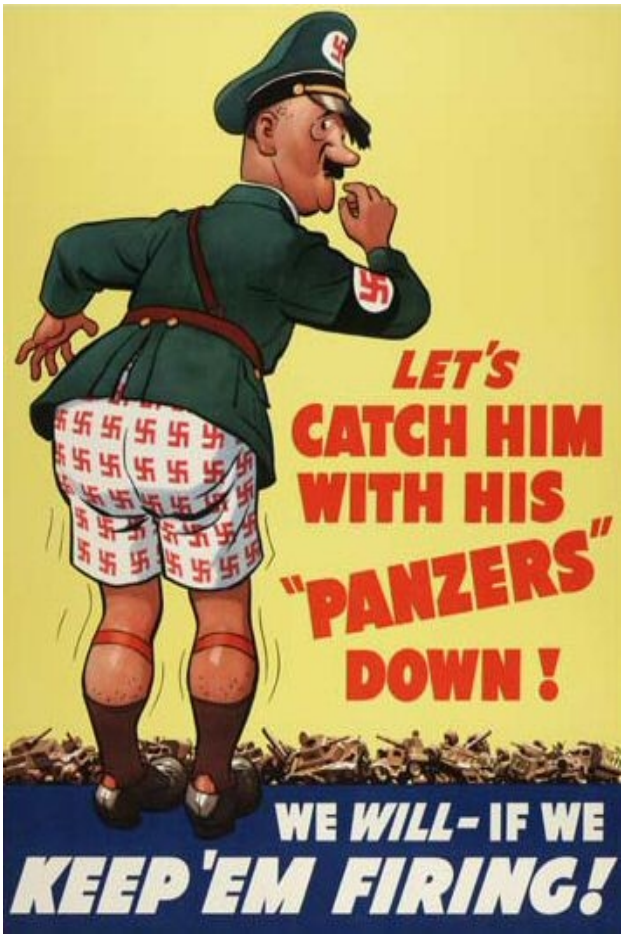

Bombing Along The Thames

on behalf of Winifred Bryan

At the beginning of the war we were living in Creek Road, Greenwich, and our house was damaged on the first day of the Blitz — September 7 1940. The family were at a friend's wedding, just sitting down to the reception, when the first bombs came down. We rushed across the road to our own shelter and stayed the rest of the afternoon and most of the night after that. The bedrooms were damaged, but we were amazed to find that the gas mantle was still perfect. They managed to shore the house up that time, but as it wasn't repaired, in time we had to move to Catford.

My father worked for the Port of London Authority at the George V docks in Woolwich. He worked 48 hour shifts. One day they bombed the docks including the sugar warehouses. The whole docks were on fire from one end to another. From our road you could look across and see the flames. The sky was all red. We didn't hear from him for two days and my mother said "that's it then". But after two days, he walked through the door, black as the ace of spades, and my mother turned round, looked at him and said "where the bloody hell have you been?" He just stood there and grinned. She said "you can have a cup of tea, but then you're going to have a bath."

Once, after I'd joined the WAAF, my friend and I hadn't heard from our parents for a while and we were worried and got a 24 hour pass to come to London to see if they were all right. We didn't have any money for the train fare, so we hitch hiked. And we were coming over Westminster Bridge in an open lorry, and a doodlebug was following us. The driver was going faster and faster and we were screaming at him to get a move on. At the end of the bridge our route and the bomb's parted. When I got home, my mother was in the garden, and when she saw me, she said "what the hell are you doing home. Get back to base. You're safer there." I agreed, we were safer in the services than the civilians.

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Boyhood Memories Of 26 Brookhill Road, Woolwich

Don Wilkinson

For several decades, 26 Brookhill Road was home to three generations of my family. This was where my grandparents raised their three daughters. It was also my home for over twenty years.

Outside 26 Brookhill Road c.1921. From left to right front row Gladys (a cousin), Doris and Lily Tomes (Doris is a younger sister of Lily,) the tallest girl who is Don's mother. Next is Lily's Aunty Ada and then Lily's grandmother. Finally Lily's mother, Mr Daley and another Aunt. The plaque on the wall refers to Lily's father Percy J Tomes, Pearl Insurance Agent. Percy Tomes was also the Hon. Secretary, Woolwich Branch, Old Contemptibles Association, which was founded by Captain J.P. Danny RA in 1925 for the men who fought in France during 1914-1918. Contemptible being the term the Kaiser used. Pity Percy wasn't in this photograph which was taken around 1922?

My mother Lillian (named after her mother and both known as Lily) was born in 1913. She would have seen very little of her father during her infancy, as the Great War was being fought in Europe.

My grandfather, Percy Tomes, returned home at the end of the war (WW1) but my grandmother's brother, Robert Edwards, did not. Robert was the thirteenth child and only son born to my great grandmother. Sgt. R.H. Edwards MM of 11 Bn. Sherwood Foresters, died in October 1918, four weeks before Armistice was signed.

I remember my grandfather as a stern solemn man, always smartly dressed with a button hole. He was a Mason and Hon. Secretary of the Woolwich Branch of the Old Contemptibles. Until the day he died, he represented the 'Old Contemptibles' on Remembrance Day at the Cenotaph in Whitehall. He was also a Pearl Insurance Agent and had a brass plaque on the wall by the front door for all to see. (This was cleaned everyday by my grandmother who also whitened the half dozen steps to the house daily.) My grandfather faithfully attended commemorative services at the Garrison Church, proudly wearing his medals. He frequently returned home for lunch with a complete stranger he had met at church. My grandmother

would quietly set another place at the table.

Patricia and her father Harold Wilkinson in Wellington Street, approaching the Town Hall 28 February 1970. Don's parents on the right of the bride. Don is standing behind the groom and Judith (Don's wife at that time) is behind the groom wearing a dark hat. The bride's niece and nephews (Don and Judith's children) are at the front of the group.

My father came from Yorkshire, married my mother at Woolwich in 1936 and worked as a lorry driver in Leytonstone, East London, before war broke out. I was born in December 1939 when another World War was escalating.

Don's Christening, Garrison Church, Woolwich, 18th Feb 1940. (Later in the war the church was bombed and destroyed)

My father had leave for my Christening early the following year. My father's uncle and aunt from Yorkshire were my godparents.

In 1944 I was evacuated with my mother, her sister Edna and my cousin Rita, to Culworth, Banbury, to escape the bombing, but I recall a Spitfire base was nearby! I briefly attended D'Anvers School for a few months before returning to Woolwich and starting at Foxhill School. I enjoyed my school days at Foxhill and was pleased to captain the football team. I still have a book "England for Everyman" by HA Piehler containing 32 coloured maps. This was a John Brown Memorial Prize awarded to me in 1951 for some achievement now forgotten.

Me, 1944, ,believed to be at Culworth, Banbury, as an evacuee.

26 Brookhill Road was divided into two flats, each with its own kitchen, but in the early days no bathroom or inside toilet. My parents had the ground floor and my grandparent's had rooms upstairs. There was a piano in the front room which my mother and her sisters had been taught to play. My father was an accomplished pianist, often playing without a music sheet. Most Sunday evenings were musical, with my grandparent's singing, accompanied by the piano.

Dad with the breakdown recovery lorry, WW11.

During the war my father drove a breakdown recovery vehicle in Egypt, until a high ranking officer seconded him as his batman and personal driver. Whenever he could, my father sent telegrams for my birthday and at Christmas. My mother kept these for me in a Baby Book.

Returning home safely after the war, my father turned his back on driving. He never owned a car and chose to walk everyday to work in North Woolwich, using the foot tunnel. He worked as a foreman for British Rail in the King Edward and Victoria docks dispatching by rail the goods brought in by the many ships from all over the World.

Back garden, Brookhill Road. My grandfather with my mother on his right holding a silver cup. My mother's older sister Maggie, on the left, holding another cup. The two ladies are my grandmother (in the dark clothing) and her sister Bella. My mother's younger sister Edna is behind the large framed certificate. These were prizes warded for "Best in Fancy Project for Band of Hope."

My Yorkshire grandfather, William Wilkinson, died before my father was born. My father was raised by his uncle Isaac and aunt. They had no children of their own. I remember my great uncle visiting our home and accompanying us on a holiday to Blackpool. Isaac Wilkinson was a prosperous Hebden Bridge Coal Merchant. My parents were amongst forty beneficiaries to his estate.

Don as Captain Foxhill School Football Team, 1950.

My sister Patricia (Pat) was born in 1947 and I moved upstairs with my grandparents. I was given a small

bedroom at the back. From my grandparents front window I could see over the wall across the road where soldiers could be seen going about their military duties.

My grandmother worked for many years in a dressmakers shop close to Woolwich Arsenal Station. I cannot recall the name of the establishment other than it was a ladies haute couture. The shop was fully carpeted and had a wonderful display of flowers in a tall jardinière. The ladies who ran the shop employed my grandmother to carry out a multitude of tasks, including cleaning and cooking. Early in the morning my grandmother would light the fire and cook breakfast. She would press the tailor made garments and often brought sewing home. She also went to John Lewis in London several times a week to collect bolts of material for the dress making shop.

Foxhill School class photo, c.1950. Don has marked his position in the photo.

In school holidays I ran errands for my grandmother, a regular one of which was breaking up small lightweight wooden crates which I collected from the fruit stalls at the market. The broken pieces made good firewood, which I took to the shop and in return was given pocket money. I would also take wood home to sell to the neighbours. I enjoyed visiting the shop and remember another very different shop nearby – Menzies pie and eel shop. The wriggling eels always fascinated me.

During school holidays I spent many a day riding back and forth on the Woolwich Free Ferries. The old coal fired engines of the paddle steamers fascinated me with their gleaming steel and highly polished brass. Sometimes I was spotted by one of the crew after making several journeys on the one ferry boat and was then told to get off. This I did, only to rejoin the next one. I should explain that during the daylight hours two boats operated and in busy times, there was three boats, two loading on either side of the river and one waiting to berth or was crossing the busy river Thames.

Sometimes I would take sandwiches to my father who was a railway foreman working in the George V and Victoria docks. He oversaw goods from all over the world, after being unloaded from very large passenger and cargo merchant ships. These goods were then loaded onto the endless goods trains, to be taken all round the country.

Quite often, when I was out running errands or playing, I was given envelopes for my father. These contained bets and money as my father was a known 'bookies runner' and had a betting account. I was always pleased to get these envelopes as I usually got sixpence from the gambler and another sixpence from my father. Due to my father's additional earning from betting, we were one of the first houses in the road to have a telephone installed.

Near the bottom of Brookhill Road, where it met Sandyhill Road, was the 'Corner Shop'

owned by Mr Tucker. He sold a multitude of goods (which probably would not be allowed by trading standards today). Bacon, eggs, cheese, coal, paraffin, candles, loose sugar and rice in sacks, soap, firewood, boot polish, various tins of food – all sold over the one counter. Mr Tucker never used paper bags; he always used blue paper, which was rolled into a cone, filled with sugar or rice or whatever, and then it was folded. The unusual but not unpleasant concoction of different aromas that met one's nose immediately upon entering the shop and was never to be forgotten..

Further up Brookhill Road were blocks of army flats screened on one side by a row of Horse Chestnut Trees. The flats and married quarters encircled a large green area. This green was a favourite haunt. Here, over the years, I spent many happy hours with the army kids, playing football, tinkering with bikes and flying model air planes, built from kits. This is where I met my oldest long standing friend, Bert, when I knocked on his door to retrieve a football that had smashed through his window. My playmates had all scattered. Bert, stern at first, accepted my apologies and gave me back the ball. Bert was a bandsman in the Royal Artillery. He played the French horn and on parade looked very grand leading the band and twirling the mace. Over fifty years later we are still good friends. After Bert left the army he became an Agent for Abbey Life and after finally retiring, he spent time at Rochester Airport with a number of enthusiasts renovating second World War fighter planes, i.e. Spitfires and Hurricanes.

It was on the green with a friend, George Rudge, I flew and lost the biggest kite we ever built. It was 6ft tall and after tying many balls of string together, it soared to an impressive height above the quarters, then broke free and disappeared over the Bloomfield/Burrage Road area. I often wondered what became of it? Where did it land and who found it?

When I was fifteen my father thought it was time I earned my own keep. I left Bloomfield School and began work in the city with the Post Office as a messenger, delivering telegrams.

In the back garden of the army quarter at Nightingale Place. From left to right, Peter Stevens, Don Wilkinson, John Burton, I don't recall the name of the fourth youth; finally Alan Stevens. The fathers of all the boys mentioned above were regular soldiers in the Royal Artillery, apart from Dons father who resumed his work as a lorry driver when coming out of the army. Peter and Alan Stevens had travelled with me to Hong Kong and back.

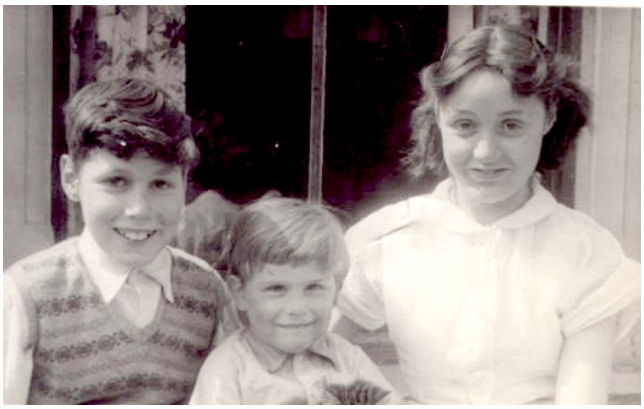
Another memory was when Malcolm (better known as "Pip") Goodman, from the army quarters, knocked on my door and asked if I would like to accompany him on a drive to visit his married sister in Romford. I looked out at the road expecting to see his latest bike and was surprised to see an old Morris with a tatty soft top. His sister had offered some canvas for the repair. We picked up John Burton and set off. Pip asked us what we thought of his driving. We thought it was good and asked how long had he been driving. 'About twenty minutes' was the startling reply!

On reaching his sister's home, we set about removing the old top and spent several hours hand stitching the new canvas to the frame. An arduous task. On completing the job we were very disappointed to realize not enough material had been allowed around the framework.

Patricia and her father Harold Wilkinson in Wellington Street, approaching the Town Hall 28 February 1970. Don's parents on the right of the bride. Don is standing behind the groom and Judith (Don's wife at that time) is behind the groom wearing a dark hat. The bride's niece and nephews (Don and Judith's children) are at the front of the group.

The hood would not fold down. The return journey was subdued with the top up.

Following my eighteenth birthday, I transferred back to Woolwich as a postman. I delivered mail around several different routes, one of which was past the AJS and Matchless Factory. I had often, in earlier years, stood outside the premises eyeing the lined up bikes and watching with envy as the testers emerged from the factory wearing goggles, back-to-front 'cheesecutters' and waxed Barbour suits. It had been my ambition to test drive the bikes. My sister in later years dated a chap who did exactly that.



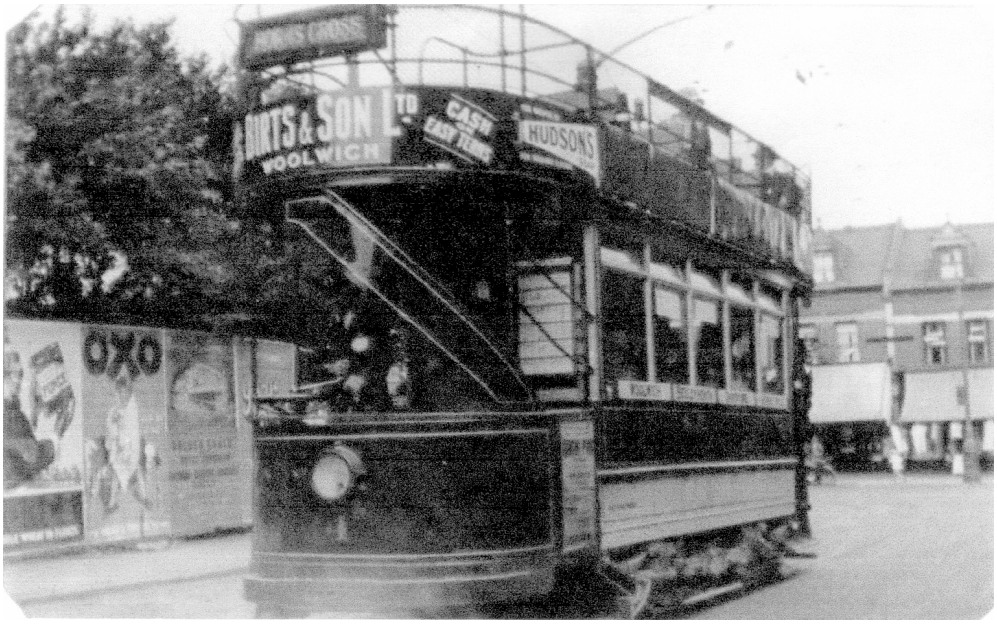
Don's Cousins, David, Ian and Mavis Green, who lived at Keemor Street, Woolwich. Don was told their father (who had a reserved occupation) was killed during an air raid. He worked at night as an ARP. Don's family lost touch with them in around 1953 when his aunt and cousins moved away.

A few months after my 20th birthday I married and left Brookhill Road. My mother remained there until her mid sixties. I had a successful and varied career with the Post Office, taking promotion whenever the opportunity arose. I opted for early retirement in 1992.

Brian (Tucker) Walker's Early Memories

Brian (always known as 'Tucker') Walker

I was born at No 65 Wickham Lane on January 28th 1944. I was one of a family of eight living at home; five step brothers and sisters, one real brother and one real sister. They were all about eight to ten years older than me. We had the top half of a house and a family by the name of Parry had the bottom half, they had many, many cats!



Behind the advertising hoarding on the left was an old air raid shelter we kids played in.

My dad, or the old man, as we called him, worked in the Arsenal tank testing I think. We went to the parties there at Christmas, just inside the Middle Gate, they were a real treat.

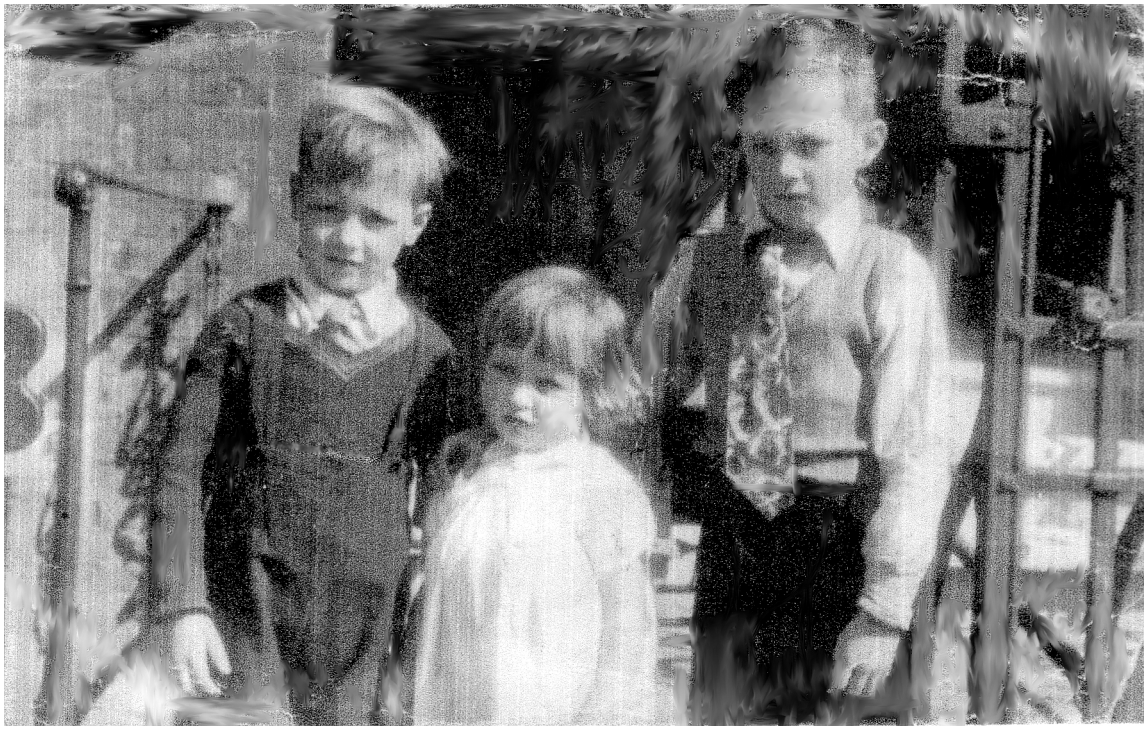
The Cubs, 2nd Woolwich, me on right and brother Alan.

I went to Wickham Lane Infants School. I remember the small cots that they made you sleep on in the afternoons, tired or not!

As kids we played on Proctor's Bank, a sand cliff. I remember all the Sand Martins nests in lots of little holes in the cliff. We also explored Rockmount Gardens and Winn's Common and the old air raid shelter on the corner of Wickham Lane and Plumstead Road.

Later on I joined the 2nd Woolwich Cubs, which was based in St Nicholas Church Hall. We had church parades and other activities on Sundays. I can't recall anything else whilst I was with them as I was too young.

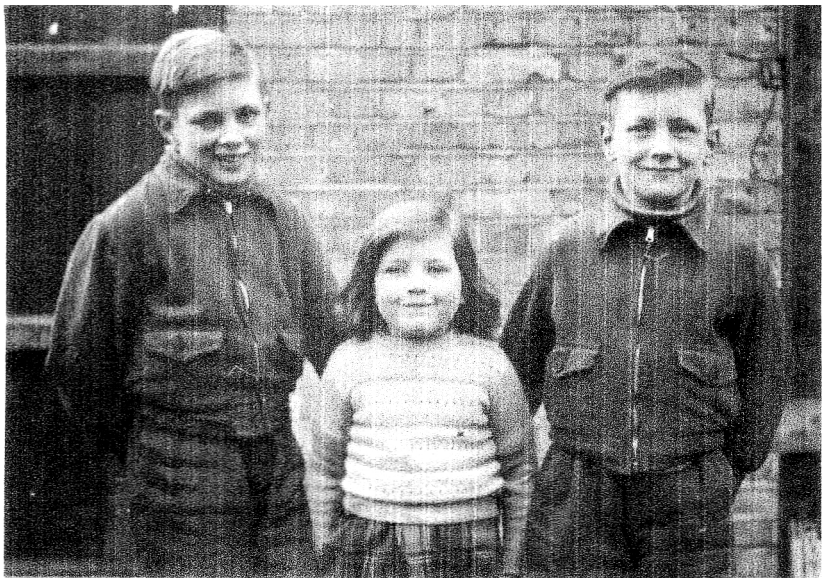
Us kids would have to pick up the batteries (accumulators) for the radio from the shop. They were great big glass things and very heavy. We would buy our gas mantles and candles from 'Oram's' the oil shop in Wickham Lane.



Brian with sister Brenda and brother Alan outside 65 Wickham Lane c.1947.

I remember a friend called Gordon Daniels who wore an Australian bush hat that his dad had acquired during the war. Gordon used to enjoy doing train impressions up and down the street.

Around 1947-8 we moved to the Co-op housing estate in Abbey Wood, to a house in McLeod Road. We had the whole house all to ourselves, but it still had an outside toilet and we still had the obligatory tin bath hanging on the back fence, but it was much better living there.



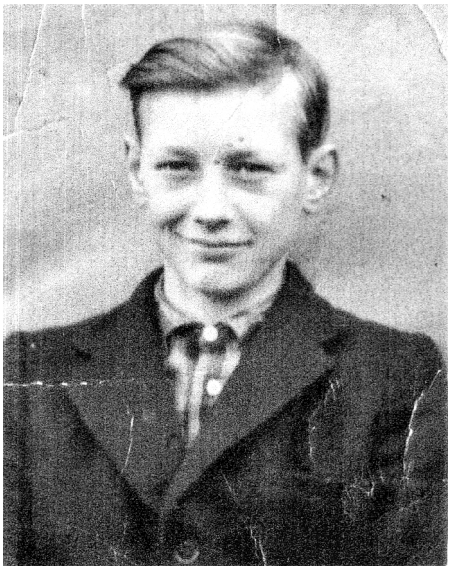
Alan, Brenda and me, McLeod Road, c.1950.

In the summer we all went hop picking, to Paddock Wood in Kent. A sort of paid holiday. We all slept on straw bales. I remember the big spiders and riding on the farmers tractor. I wonder if others did this?

I then went to Bostall Lane Infants and Juniors. Mr Snapes was my last teacher there, a real man, I loved him. I played for the school football team. We played mainly on Winn's Common. We would change in the old big round shaped Nissan hut, a very cold shed.

I failed the 11 plus exam and went to Wickham Lane School again. This was OK because I was with most of my mates again, so I was very happy there. These days were the happiest of my life. In the holidays we would go to the dump at the bottom of White Heart Road and pinch bike parts and other bits and pieces and we would make up bikes and box carts. When you walked on the actual dump your shoes would start to melt with the heat that came from the still smouldering and burning rubbish pile.

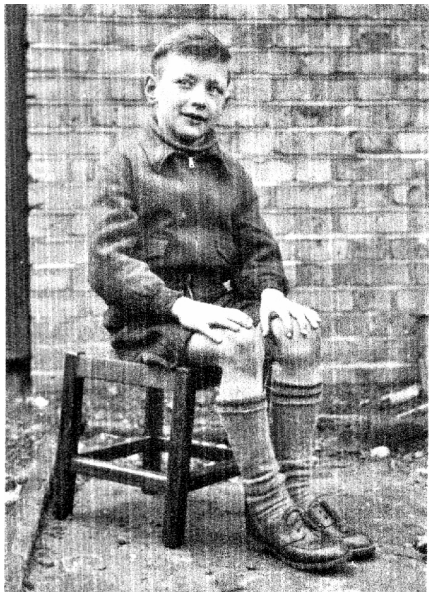
At this time I belonged to the 29th Woolwich Scouts, based in Abbey Wood Road. I remember the time that we went on a camping trip to Stanstead with them. I hated every minute. From the first night I just wanted to go home; all that ging gang gooly round the camp fire did nothing for me at all.



Me in 1st year at Wickham Lane, 1955, Mr Evan's class.

At Wickham Lane, I recall the teachers names. They were, Mr Griffin (The Grim Reaper), Mr Fatty Waites, Mr Whitworth (good footballer), Percy Evans (Head, nice man), Mr Stiles (Art), Mr Armond (Wood Work) and Mr Bourne (P E). When you went swimming at Plumstead Baths we used to get ourselves a hot cup of OXO and bread, by sneaking around to the rear and up the stairs to the cafe, while the class was still swimming in the baths.

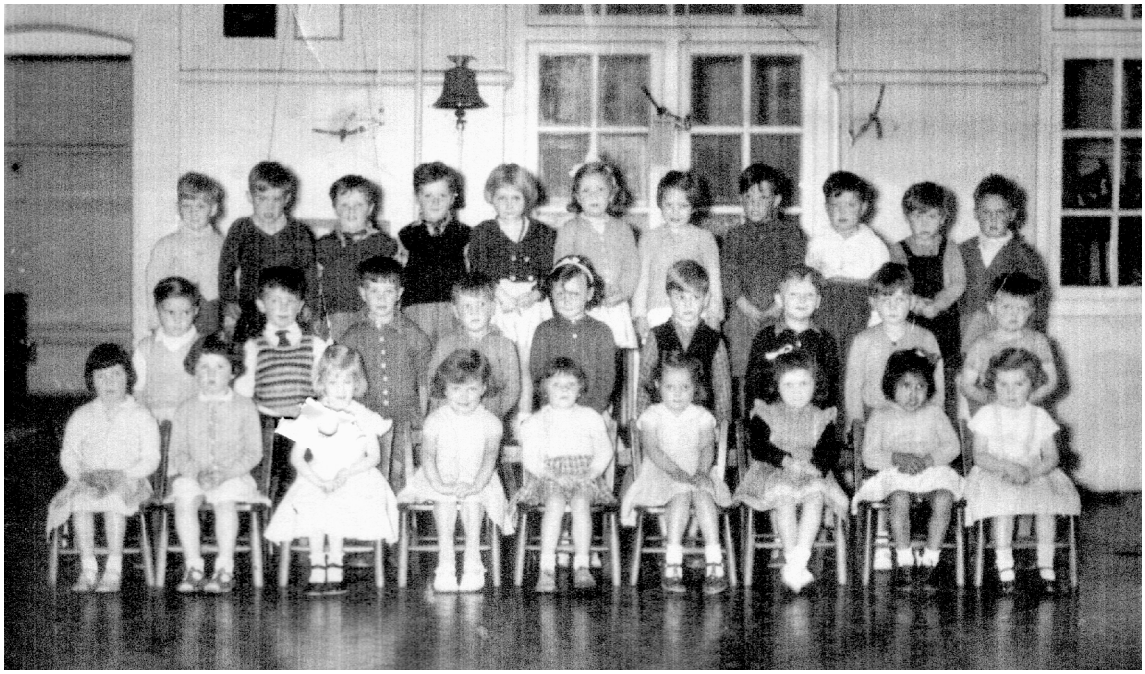
One year, Gordon Hurst the Charlton Athletic player took us for football, that was really special.



Brian in back garden 154 McLeod Road c.1953.

I left school in 1959 and was an apprentice to the RACS (Royal Arsenal Cooperative Society) as a Plumber. I worked from the Commonwealth Buildings, Woolwich Dockyard. I used to maintain all the RACS properties in the area. They, the RACS, used to do everything in those buildings, butter making, smoking bacon, burials... everything.

My father-in-law worked at the AJS factory. He recalls the time that they built a racing bike called"The Plumstead Porcupine". I wonder what happened to that? He recalls some names of the co-workers, such as Maurice Moore, works manager, Jim Jeffs, George Batty, Test Riders. Bert Price, Lift Driver, Arthur Martin, Trade Plate Fitter. My father-in-law's name is Vic Graham. He said it was a happy place to work.



My wife to be Connie, 6th from left, at Earl Rise School c.1957-8?

Connie, 6th from left again, Earl Rise School c.1959? *All photos Brian Walker.*

In 1977 I married Connie, my second wife. She lived at 71 Parkdale Road, next door to the Dicken's shop; we used to get lovely cured ham from there which tasted great.

When Connie was a young girl she went to Earl Rise Infants School. (see two photos above) Later on she went to Church Manorway.

We are still together (2009) 32 years later.

Brian Whelan Recalls His Plumstead Childhood Days

I thought I would try to recall things in two parts: Part 1 War time and Part 2 Postwar.

Part One

Brian aged 9 Timbercroft School.

I should have been evacuated in about 1942, at the tender age of four years old. A fleet of old Bedford coaches were in our road and we were dressed up in our Sunday best. I had a little case, a gas mask and a label was pinned to my coat. I was just about to board the coach when my mum dragged my brother and me off of it, saying, we cannot go. I know I was upset because I thought I was going on an adventure trip. Years later, when I was grown up, I asked mum about it. She said, "If we were going to be killed, then we would all go together". I thought that it was a courageous thing to do and also how brave she was to look after us for the rest of the war.

In Timbercroft Lane Primary/Junior school, at morning assembly, they would sometimes read out the names of pupils who had died in a bombing raid. I was upset one morning when I heard that my little sweetheart Audrey, had gone.

Brian, circled, Timbercroft School, 1948.

The school photo was taken in 1948 and after the brick walls in front of the windows had been taken down that were there to protect us little darlings from bomb damage.

Does anyone remember the red fire alarm stanchions that were dotted around our streets?. We had one right opposite our house, on the corner of Warland Road. I was often a suspect when some idiot smashed the glass and sent a hoax call. I know I was a bit of a sod, but that is one thing I would not do.

During a raid one night a mobile anti-aircraft gun unit parked outside our house. When it opened up, all the windows at the front of our house blew in; it certainly woke me up! But, luckily for us, the blackout at the windows saved me and our family from being showered with glass. Next day there were two gouges in the kerb where the gun unit had steadied itself for stability. The marks were still there when I left the area in 1965.

We had a lovely big dog named Jan; he was my guardian angel, I could write a book about Jan, but suffice to say we were inseparable. During a day time raid our door was blown out. Poor Jan took flight, my mum would not let me go out to find him (boo). After the all clear siren I was off looking for him, but to no avail, (boohoo). Next day we got word that a dog like Jan had taken refuge in a greengrocers shop at Birds Nest Hollow, some four or five miles away. Mum and me rushed over there to find he had been injured by shrapnel but otherwise he was OK and very happy to see us both. The greengrocer had bathed and dressed his wound. I was so happy. In fact he was the only one of us to receive a `war wound` to show off!

I was out with Jan one day, over at Shrewsbury Woods, when I heard the familiar sound of a Doodle Bug's drone (V1). Looking up I saw that it was not all that high above the trees. Being now a veteran of the war at seven years old, I knew what to do. Seeing the direction it was going I ran the opposite way and counted up to five and then dived under a bush and covered Jan with my body. There was a tremendous explosion and the ground shook, branches and leaves came showering down, then all became quiet. So we continued our walk as if nothing had happened. Mind you, mum was going ape sh*t when we got home.

From about the age of seven (1945) onward, I used to help our aged milkman Fred. I would be up early so I could do the round before school. It was a horse and cart job. I was trusted to take the reins and drive the milk float, which was fantastic, until he lifted his tail and farted or dropped his load (no, the horse not Fred). The only dodgy times were if there was an air raid, then we would have to pacify the horse. But I did make some pennies by selling fresh horse manure!

We had great excitement once, when a Jerry fighter plane came down in the fields near us. When the Army and the ARP declared the area safe, us kids were all over the plane looking for souvenirs. The Army hadn't left much but we did get some perspex from the window, which was great because we could make things like rings and badges and things from it. There was always a battle for altimeters etc. Now, here's an old war time joke. After a bombing raid, rescuers were digging out a bombed house. They came across a man still sitting on the toilet, he was laughing his head off. When asked "what the hell are you laughing at?" He replied, "Well, I pulled the chain and the bloody house fell down!"

At last the end of war came and, being only eight, I couldn't get my head around that. War

was the only way of life I knew. I asked my mum “Does that mean that there will be no more `news` on the wireless?" Mum replied, "Oh, I expect they will find something to talk about!” We had street parties, bonfires; it all seemed odd somehow and I had never seen adults getting so drunk before, most strange.

Part Two

During and after the war I loved to muck about at the ravine on Plumstead Common. We played war games and all sorts of other games, the terrain of the valley fired up our imaginations. One such game was `Cowboys & Indibums', but it did get a bit serious when Geoff Cooper and I fitted dart barrels to our arrows. Wow, didn't our arrows fly then! We could hit a tree from quite a distance and they would stick into any wooden target. They were lethal. Once, another mate, Brian Spanner, fired one at a parked car and it went through the radiator, he retrieved his arrow and we ran like mad leaving the car spurting out water. (bloody little hooligans!)

I then Joined the Cubs, which was run by our local vicar, Rev Metcalf, of the Church of the Ascension at the junction of Timbercroft Lane and Irwin Avenue. The hall was at the junction of Lakedale and King's Highway, on Winn's Common. I wasn't all that keen on the Cubs, so Geoff and I would skive off to the ravine to muck about.

Sometimes, when sent on shopping errands to the Slade shops, I couldn't resist sloping off across the road and into the ravine. Of course, if dad heard about it, it meant another sore arse from my dads belt, ouch! and did it smart!

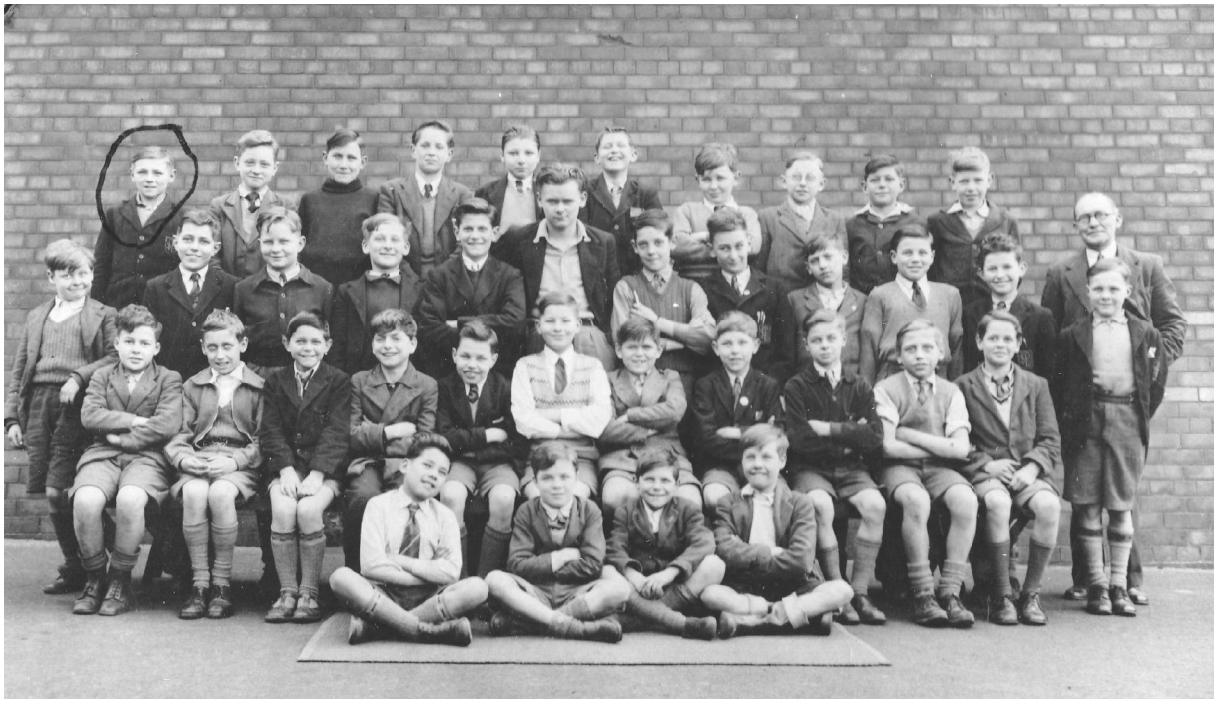
My dad survived the war, but he had not been home long before he was carted off to hospital with acute tummy ulcers and he had to have his stomach removed. The doctors lost him twice, but they managed to get him back. He was never a well man and suffered for the rest of his life. I was beginning to realise the horrors of war!

I suppose I was ten years old when we got into the `barrow or soapbox` phase. I made mine with just a plank and four wheels, with no box or brakes. Welton Road is on a hill. I was the fastest kid around. Looking back, I could have killed my stupid self. I once gave my mate Brian Spanner a ride. I laid down so I could steer and Brian sat on my legs. When we got to the bottom of the road, at a frightful speed, I had to veer left into Swingate Lane. Brian was thrown off but he caught his arm on the wheel and finished up with a big gash in his arm and had to have lots of stitches in it. That taught me a lesson that speed and sharp turns do not mix! Another time, I was out with Geoff Cooper and at the bottom of King's Highway and Wickham Road, we found a sand cliff. So we thought we'd dig a tunnel .Unfortunately, the tunnel collapsed on Geoff and I had to dig him out. When I finally got him out he was only semi conscious, I managed to revive him enough to get him home to his mum.

My first bike was a second hand 24 inch rust heap, but with some TLC and a lick of paint, it was my pride and joy. I would take off by myself and explore the whole area. I got many a wallop from dad for being home late. It seems a bit daft now because I was told to "Be home by 6 pm or else!" But none of us had a watch, even clocks, like the one on the Co op at Plumstead Common (Links) were not working. I went off my dad after that.

At eleven years old, I had the choice to go to Wickham Road or to Plum Lane Secondary School. I chose the latter as it was a bit nearer. I got in trouble again there because Geoff and

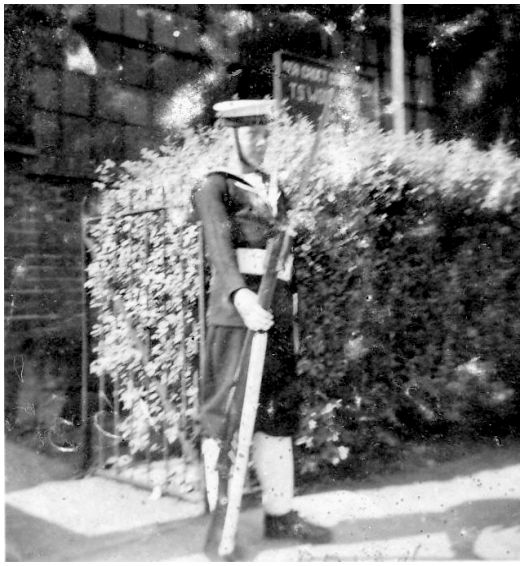
I played truant and went off on our bikes across the Woolwich Ferry and did some exploring over there in North Woolwich. Next day at school we got `six of the best`. Another sore lesson learnt! I must have been a glutton for punishment.



Plum Lane Secondary School. I was there from 1949 to 1953. That's me back row far left, age 12. When I left I went to work at Siemans Bros at Charlton I hated factory life so at 16 I joined the cable ship Ocean Layer and never looked back.

My brother John, 14 and me, 10, as choir boys at the Church of the Ascension, 20 Oct 1948.

I then joined the Ascension Church choir. It was `High Church`, also, I started `Confirmation` classes, (only because my brother had). But I just could not believe in all this mumbo jumbo, it just did not grab me. (I apologise to any believers).



Brian, at about 14, Sea Cadet, Conway Road Church Hall 19??.The rifle was a short Le Enfield with a real 14 inch bayonet. The whole thing was a bit taller than me.

At twelve years old I joined the Woolwich Sea Cadet Corps (377). Now this I did enjoy, it made more sense to me. I liked the discipline and everything about the Navy. Going away on courses with the RN was fantastic, although the instructors did not seem to like us kids and they gave us a hard time. By the time I got to the

age of 17 and went to sea myself, I had reached the dizzy height of Cadet Petty Officer.

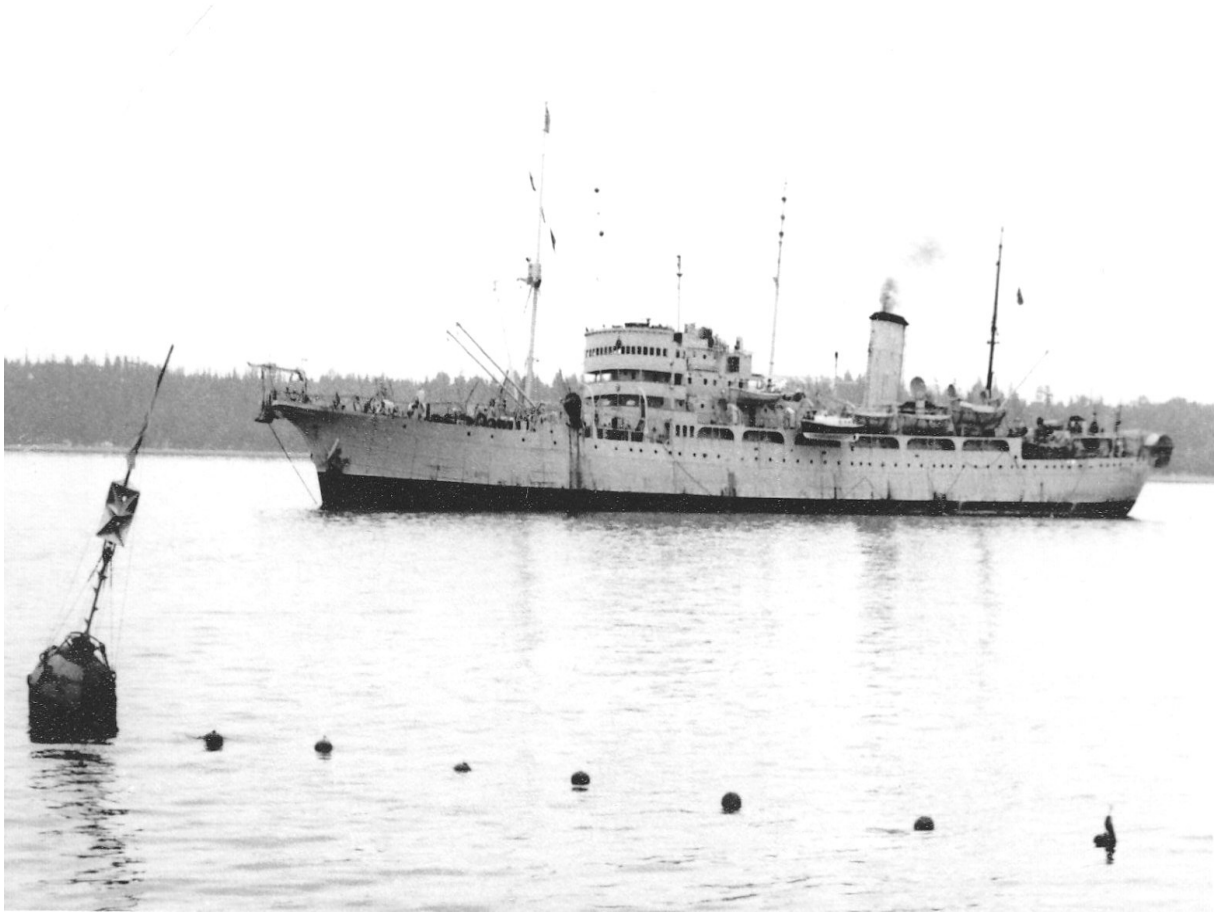
We used to have many church parades through Woolwich. When our band would compete with the Air Training Corps, the Army Cadet Force and the Boys Brigade. (I thought that the ATC had the edge on us, but I would never admit it.) In the Guard we would proudly carry our short Le-Enfield rifles, even with fixed bayonets. It would not be allowed now as they could be quite lethal in the wrong hands. I remember once we had been on a parade to St Mary's Church I think was. It was near the Woolwich Ferry. As we walked back along Powis Street we were accosted by some `teddy boys` who were taking the mick. We were carrying our rifles, and the senior lad, Brian Appleton, or 'appy' as we called him, gave the order `fix bayonets!' The `Teds` fled and we chased them all the way into Beresford Square, where they scattered and scarpered. Can you imagine doing that now? We also kept our boats in the Arsenal, moored by the 'big gun' crane. We spent more time repairing the boats than sailing them as they were old RN throw-outs, but that was half the fun. There were no accidents as we were taught safety and how to use guns. In fact, we were trained in many aspects of naval warfare, i.e.:- How to load and fire a 4 inch gun, how to use the Asdic to locate submarines, load and fire torpedoes, Morse, semaphore, and many other things. We were told that in the event of another war, we would be the first to be called up. I was quite excited, but as I grew older, I realised what war was all about & changed my thinking.

I used to love riding on the trams. I would go up on the top deck and walk forward to the front as it sped along and they would sway so much, I could pretend I was at sea. Another time I saved up my pennies and took the No 54 bus to a place called Selsdon. I had often seen it but had no idea where it was. It was a bit disappointing when I got there, but it solved my wanderlust.

I was now aged fourteen when, on the 5th July 1952, the last tram , No 1952, same number as the year, left Woolwich that night. I tried to get on that last ride but the crowds were too thick and I could not get through.

At Plum Lane School we did not have a Woodwork room as it had been bombed, so we had to go to Waverley Road School for it. In my last year at school I was allowed to build my own canoe. It became a show piece at our school open day, I was well chuffed. I had many happy hours battling the waves on the Thames in it. How I did not drown my stupid self I don't know!

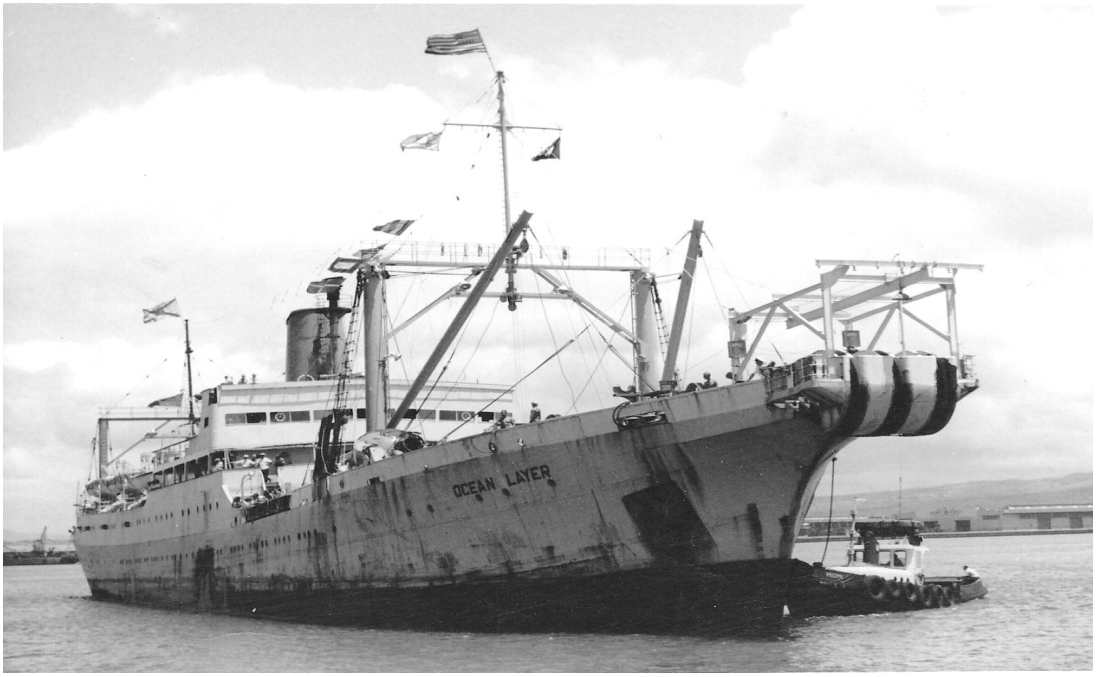
My first drink at a pub was at the Brewery Tap near the bottom end of Lakedale Road. I was sixteen and I was in my Sea Cadet uniform; I was a man of the world, or so I thought, how we ever got served I've no idea. At seventeen, I'm an old sea dog now and I used to play the guitar, just strumming it and accompanying Daisy on the piano in the `Ship Inn` on Plumstead Common, near to Bird Nest Hollow. Two lads from the ATC joined in with a trumpet and a small snare drum. The pub would get packed on Friday and Saturday nights. Even my dad came along with his violin. Those were the days.



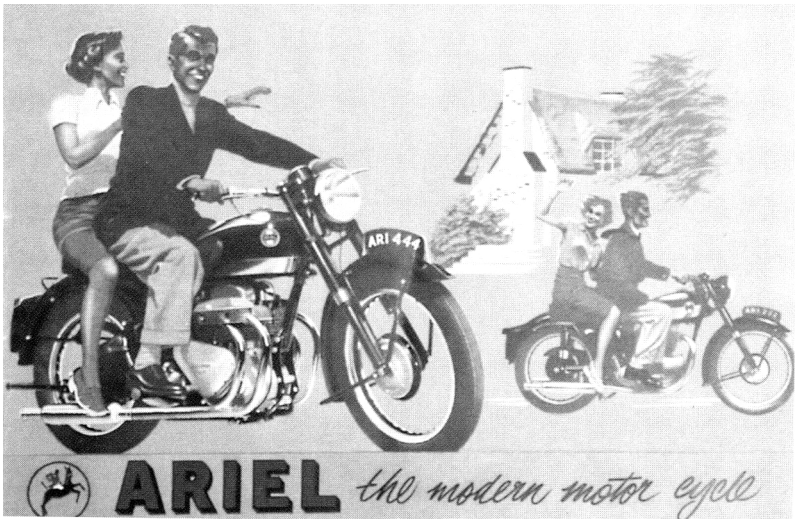
Cableship `Ocean Layer` My first ship. I joined her when I was 16, as a deck boy. She was claimed from the Germans after the war, a cargo ship, She was then called the `Empire Frome`. Was acquired by `Telcon Ltd` & converted into a cableship at Pembroke Dock, where I joined her. I was on her from 1955 to 1960, and visited many parts of the world. Such as, Norway, Germany, France, Portugal, all around the Med, South America, South Africa, Mombasa, Seychelles, India, Red sea, Panama Canal, San Francisco, Vancouver, and Hawaii and more. I really enjoy it, but it was hard work and dangerous sometimes. In the photo we are docking at Honolulu, the ship is somewhat battered. By the time I left I had risen to Helmsman/Quartermaster. A year after I left she caught fire & burnt out in the Atlantic. The `Ocean Layer` was generally berthed at Greenwich, At Telcon Ltd factory. Our nearest pub was the `Cuttysark`. The `Monarch` was generally berthed at Erith, at the Submarine Cables Ltd factory. Although sometimes it was vice versa. On the `Iris` we berthed at Woolwich, at the bottom of Warspite Road. There was a submarine depot next to Siemans Bros (sub cable & telephone equipment). All three ships were berthed at Dolphins, so we had to use a boat to get ashore.

Mum, at about age 60, out our house in 37 Welton Rd. We were setting off on a trip to Kent. She liked riding pillion, she was certainly game for a laugh.

Brian, 18, on `Bessie`, My pride and joy. A 200cc Ariel Colt. I bought it brand new after a handsome payout from the cable ship Ocean Layer. Once, when on leave, I toured England and Scotland on it. In Scotland I experienced the most awful weather, but being an old sea dog it didn't matter!



My 2nd cableship, The `HMTS Monarch`. 1960 to 1963. Then we mainly laid new cables across the pond to the USA, but also we did a lot of repairs on existing cables. One hairy thing was that we got caught in a hurricane, we lost some tackle but we survived. Another exciting trip was to lay a cable up to Greenland for a USA early warning centre under the ice at Thule. It was a bit unnerving laying a cable so close to icebergs. They said that if you went in the water you would only have, at most, one minute to live, wasn't very nice!. I understand that the Monarch's keel was laid down to be a light cruiser for the RN, but was not required for the war effort. In the photo we are picking up a shore end cable, secured to the buoy, off Brest in France, to splice on the deep-sea cable and lay it across to America.



Childhood Memories

WJ Sales

I find it difficult to remember much prior to the age of eight years of age, although I can recall that I went to Conway School. I recall at the age of five, being coached by my sister Barbara, to tell the time from the R.A.C.S clock at the bottom of Lakedale Road. I may be a bit foggy about this but I think she used to do this from the playground at Conway Road; from there it was possible to see the 'stores clock' as it was known. My Brother Len and I were taken to Conway School in the morning by a girl who lived in Sladedale Road and was just a little bit older that us. I think her name was Queenie Waring. Len was a year older than me and I can recall that I referred to him as my 'big brother', which came in handy, because if any boy tried to bully me he was warned, "I will tell my my big brother of you"; the reason I mention this, was that Len and I travelled the same road together at school (more or less).

L-R are Johnny Hann, Len Sales, Gert Sales and Bill Sales.

They were happy days at Conway. Dad used to meet us after school on Thursday and give us a halfpenny each. (This was the day that dad received the weekly payment from the R.O., which was the Reliving Office where the poor received a small state payment, and we were poor.) The money he gave us was spent in the corner shop by the school on some tiger nuts, which were nasty little hard things, but we got a lot for our money.

Len and I used to go round the back of the Co-op to collect any spare bits of wood that were left laying about, which we took home in an old barrow we made from four old pram wheels

and axles fitted to a plank and a wooden box. When we arrived home, our dad took the wood out in the back yard and removed all the nails and straightened them out with a hammer to be used again, and then the wood was chopped into small sticks, to be used as fire wood. At one time, dad made us a cricket bat from some of this precious commodity.

The barrow was also put to another lucrative use; we carried home horse manure which we sold at tuppence a load that we collected from the local blacksmiths yard in Tewson Road. We also had a lot of fun with the barrow when it wasn´t in use for errands. The area we lived in was very hilly; we had a few spills racing down them but suffered nothing worse than a few cuts and bruises. Strange to relate that when I married we moved to a house in Lakedale Road, next door to the very same blacksmith.

Sister Pat (Bottom right) at Church Manorway School about 1935.

I think at this stage, I should mention the house we lived in at 93 Sladedale Road. It consisted of two rooms and a scullery and three bedrooms upstairs. The living room, or back room as we called it, was fairly small and housed a kitchen range with a small place for a coal fire and an oven. There was just enough room for a table and two chairs and two easy chairs; one for dad and one for mum. The scullery housed a cooker, a small sink and a concrete contraption in the corner for boiling the whites. The scullery floor was so rough that it was not possible to lay lino. We had no bathroom and had to use a tin bath, which was put in the cold scullery when needed for a bath. In the winter, we had the luxury of it being put in front of the fire in the living room.

WJ Sales, Ancona School 1935.

At the age of eleven, we went to Ancona Road School where we played cricket and football for our school - our football boots were our everyday boots with the laces replaced by white ones. On one occasion, I took seven

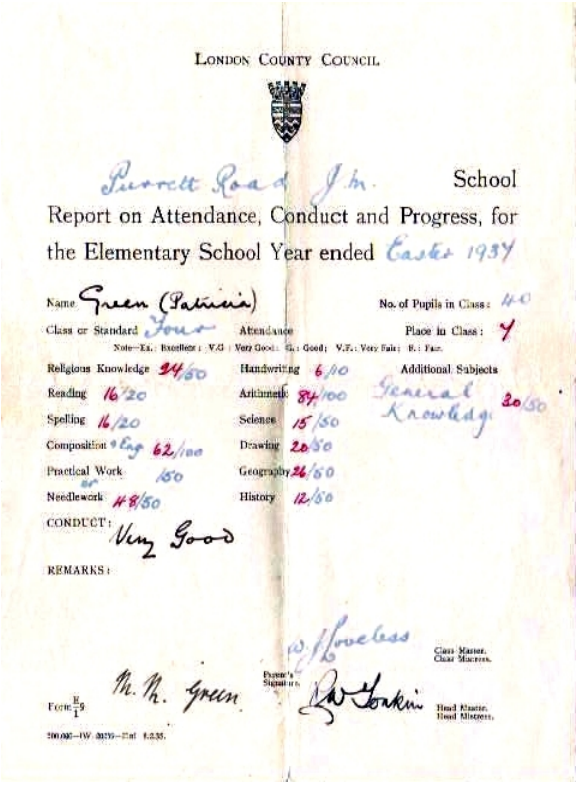
wickets at a cost of two runs. I would have normally received an autographed ball for that, but unfortunately for me, one of our team scored fifty runs and he received an award from the Star Newspaper and I missed out, that´s life!

While at Ancona Road School, I won a Trade Scholarship. I was fourteen and this would have entitled me to attend the School of Navigation, at Poplar, but mum and dad put the block on it and I had to go to work; times were hard and they needed the money. I applied for a job in the Central Office of the Woolwich Arsenal and while waiting to hear from them I stayed on at school. I vividly recall a particular day; I was in the corridor when a well dressed man asked me the way to the Headmasters Office. After a short while the headmaster, Mr Greengrass, called me to his room and introduced me to the well dressed man, a Mr Percy Cutts the Accounts Manager from Woods and Maslen, Lloyd's Insurance Brokers. I remember being asked if I knew Lloyd's; the only Lloyd's I knew were the bank, but I must have made an impression on him, as I was offered the job. As a result of this the teachers had a whip round to enable me to buy a suit to start my first job in the City. I was quite the little Dandy.

I stared work with a weekly wage of fifteen shillings. This mostly went to mum, leaving me just enough for my fare to and from work with a bit for myself (fare from Plumstead Station to Cannon Street was two shilling and sixpence return). After a while, I bought a bike and cycled to work; arriving at the office at eight am, thereby saving the train fare. At the age of fourteen I was only a little fella, in fact I was known at work as little John, why John, I don´t know, but the name stuck and I was called John for the thirty six years I worked there.

The office at 107 Old Broad Street was a real old fashioned place and consisted mainly of one large room with an open fireplace at each end and smaller adjacent rooms for the bosses and typists. Just to make the point how old it was, the lift was not electric but hydraulic and had a rope running through it which had to be pulled manually by the person in the lift. My job as the 'office boy' was to arrive at eight am, light the fires and make sure the bosses ink wells had ink in them and put out clean blotting paper. I had to deliver letters to various other offices, such as Insurance Companies, covering an area of almost the entire City; this took all the morning. When it wasn´t raining it was okay. I got to know all the little alley ways and discovered some very ancient buildings and churches. In the office my main job was filing letters and acting as general dogsbody. Until the War started in 1939, life was fairly humdrum.

While at work I was able to buy a radiogram from Barker's of Kensington for four shillings a week for mum and dad. This was really something, as they never had anything like it before. The records that Len and I bought were not always to our parents liking, much as today's music isn´t to mine; nothing really changes does it? It was on this radio in 1939, a day I shall never forget; the Prime Minister announced that we were at War with Germany. That was a huge turning point in a lot of peoples lives, including mine. From that point, life took on a different meaning, but that´s another story!



LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL

Purrett Road J.M. School

Report on Attendance, Conduct and Progress, for the Elementary School Year ended Easter 1937

Name Green (Patricia) No. of Pupils in Class: 40

Class or Standard Four Attendance Place in Class: 7

Note—Ex.: Excellent; V.G.: Very Good; G.: Good; V.F.: Very Fair; F.: Fair.

Religious Knowledge 24/50 Handwriting 6/10 Additional Subjects

Reading 16/20 Arithmetic 84/100 General Knowledge 30/50

Spelling 16/20 Science 15/50

Composition Eng 62/100 Drawing 20/50

Practical Work or 50 Geography 26/50

Needlework 48/50 History 12/50

CONDUCT: Very Good

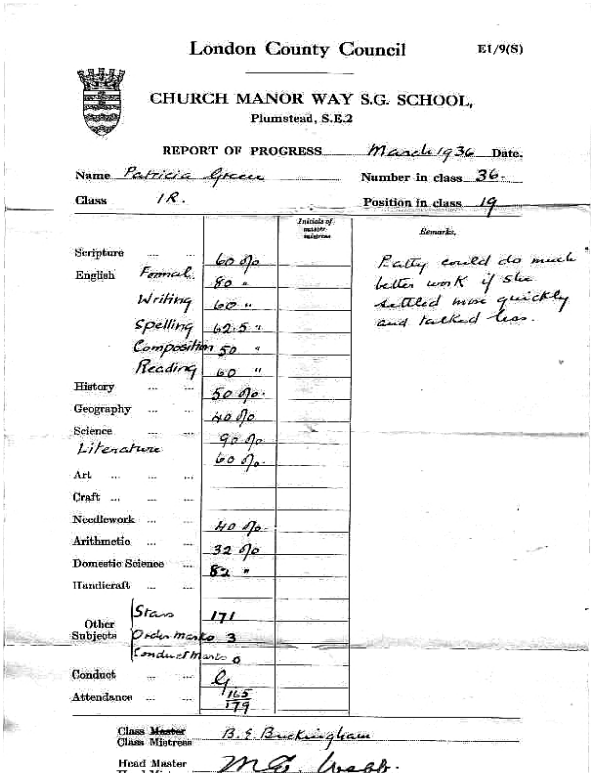
REMARKS:

W. J. Loveless Class Master, Class Mistress.

Parent's Signature. M. M. Green

Form E/1 9 Head Master, Head Mistress.

500,000—(W. 20259—21a) 8.2.35.



London County Council E1/9(S)

CHURCH MANOR WAY S.G. SCHOOL,
Plumstead, S.E.2

REPORT OF PROGRESS March 1936 Date.

Name Patricia Green Number in class 36.

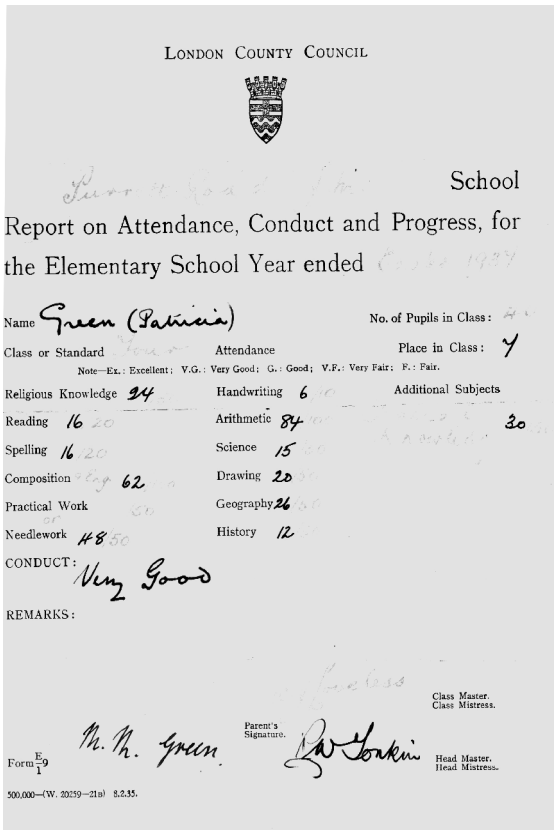
Class 1R. Position in class 19

			Initials of master mistress	Remarks.
Scripture		60 %		Patty could do much better work if she settled more quickly and talked less.
English	Formal	80 "		
	Writing	60 "		
	Spelling	62.5 "		
	Composition	50 "		
	Reading	60 "		
History		50 %		
Geography		40 %		
Science		90 %		
Literature		60 %		
Art				
Craft				
Needlework		40 %		
Arithmetic		32 %		
Domestic Science		82 "		
Handicraft				
Other Subjects	Stars	171		
	Order marks	3		
	Conduct marks	0		
Conduct		G		
Attendance		165/179		

Class Master / Class Mistress B. S. Buckingham

Head Master M. G. Webb.

Sister Pats. Purrett Road School reports, 1937 and l938 and her Conduct-Attendance report. She was got ready for evacuation and she cried so much she never went. She had no schooling after the age of 12.



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Reading 16 20 Arithmetic 84 30

Spelling 16 20 Science 15

Composition Eng 62 Drawing 20

Practical Work or 50 Geography 26

Needlework 48 50 History 12

CONDUCT: Very Good

REMARKS:

W. J. Loveless Class Master, Class Mistress.

Parent's Signature. M. M. Green

Form E/1 9 Head Master, Head Mistress.

500,000—(W. 20259—21a) 8.2.35.

Lyn Davidson adds:

Here is some additional story information in regards to our family history in Plumstead.

Elizabeth Fuller, nee Mills, was born in 1844 in Cage Lane, Plumstead. Eldest of nine children she was born to Henry Mills and Caroline Argent, who married in 1840. Henry came to Plumstead from Suffolk and worked as a blacksmith in Woolwich Arsenal.

John Fuller was Elizabeth's husband and they had 13 children, with only one dying at a young age. She lived most of her life in Plumstead. From the photo, below, Elizabeth looked to be a tiny lady, but obviously a strong one, as she died aged 87, after having a really tough life. Her youngest child was only months old when her husband died of Meningitis in 1890. She then had to work to help support her family. She worked as a charlady whilst her daughter-in-law (my great grandmother) was left to care for Elizabeth's children, with six under the age of

fourteen years, plus she also had a baby of her own.

After living at various addresses in Plumstead, Elizabeth's home address was 105 Parkdale Road, Plumstead, 1901. Life must have been easier by this time, with five of her children still living at home and contributing to the household bills and only one child still at school. For what ever reason, they still found the need to share the house with another family, which made eight adults and three children all sharing this house.

This lady obviously populated the Plumstead area with many Fuller descendants. I would love to hear from any of them.

Elizabeth Fuller, nee Mills, with grandsons Robert Fuller on left and Robert Urpeth on right. Taken c.1920.

Childhood Memories 1931-1950

Beryl Reynolds

The old lady and her husband, a Mr and Mrs Gummer, were the tenants of No 9 Gossage Road and lived there with their two sons Reginald and Vincent. My auntie Em married Vincent and had three sons. I think Vincent and Em moved into No 9 when one of the old people died . Lennie and Reg were their two younger sons. Vincent had died by 1928. My mum and I moved there in 1931. Lennie contracted TB and used to go to an open air school for Tuberculosis victims, which was on Shooter's Hill. He died in about 1936. My auntie took over the tenancy when both of the old people had died

So my childhood 1931-1950 was spent in Plumstead, in Gossage Road, firstly in No 9 (see photo taken circa 1926) which was owned by the Woolwich Borough Council (WBC) and rented to my auntie who was a widow with three sons. Mum and I lived there after my father's death in 1931 till 1943, when mum and I moved to No 1A. Can anyone remember the large white house that looked directly down Griffin Road, That too was owned by the council and had been turned into two flats; we had the top one.. It had obviously been a splendid residence at one time. It had a kitchen and servants quarters in the basement (used for storage purposes by WBC when we lived there).

Lennie, Reg and their gran at No 9 Gossage Road c.1926.

I used to play on the Common; my favourite place being the Slade. At the Ravine ponds

there was a gap in the railings that surrounded the ponds and any daring kids used to squeeze through them, but the REALLY brave ones used to go up the pipe that carried a trickle of water into the ponds.

The Common was patrolled by the Common Keepers. They wore a very smart brown uniform and were held in awe by us kids. There was a particular very old gnarled hawthorn that everyone climbed and down next to the railings round the pond was a large willow tree that some of the big boys managed to climb up into. But mostly we made dens in the gorse bushes and played hide and seek.

On Winn's Common there were two pools. One was a large pond that had paddle-boats and canoes on it for hire and the other was a paddling pool where we used to sail our toy boats. During the war the larger boating pond was bombed and was later turned into an adventure type playground, but the paddling pool remained and is still in use today.

I went to Bloomfield Road School, walking from the end of Heavitree Road to Plumstead Common Road, past the bandstand, the War Memorial and The Globe picture house. I remember there was a large lump of some sort of conglomerate rock just below the Globe, but I have no idea how or why it was there. The midday break at school was from 12.00 to 2.00 to give us kids time to go home and have a meal, so I walked between the school and Gossage Road four times a day whatever the weather. My teachers were all first class and I remember them with much affection.

For two years running, I was able to go on a fortnight long school journey to Norfolk. We stayed in Ingham Old Hall which had been a monastery up until Henry the Eighths time. Each child was given a diary/workbook with Information about what we would see. It must have taken hours to produce as each page had to be hand written and then reproduced on a hectograph tray, one page at a time.

We visited Caley's Chocolate factory, Coleman's Mustard factory, a jam factory and a steam laundry. We also went to Norwich Castle and a windmill and several old churches. We also had trips on the Broads and went to the beach.

In September 1939 I was evacuated to Sandhurst in Kent. Only 30-40 children from the school went, accompanied by Mrs Foster, my lovely teacher, and Mrs Lucas the school caretaker's wife. We had to meet at school first and then we all walked in pairs to the Woolwich Arsenal Station. We all wore labels that were tied to our coats and had our gas-masks, which were in cardboard boxes, slung over our shoulders. Relatives formed an accompanying procession. At the time I wasn't upset because mum told me it would be just like another school journey. There was always a good rapport between mum and Mrs Foster, possibly because they were both widows with one daughter. I don't remember much about the journey. It seemed interminable and I was desperate to go to the toilet, but it was not a corridor train so I had to wait.

My year in Sandhurst was a very happy one, though it wasn't the safest place to be as we were witness to many dog-fights between the RAF and German planes on their way to bomb London.

I passed the Scholarship and on 11th of September 1940. I received a letter telling me that the next day I would be collected by Miss Summers, the Head Mistress of King's Warren School

(known as the 'brown school') and taken to Maidstone. I think she must have wondered who on earth was joining her school, as I had spent the previous two weeks hop-picking and had the stains to prove it! I must have looked a grotty little urchin because cleanliness was not high on the list of priorities when one had to get up at first light to spend ten hours hop picking in the fields and there was only one cold tap in the cottage.

I went from one extreme to the other because, in Maidstone, I was billeted with a Salvation Army family in a new modern house. (The silly thing about being evacuated was that we went home for the holidays, so I was still very Plumstead orientated.) Maidstone also was not a very safe place to be and I spent many nights in the air raid shelter out in the garden and then, all too often, most of the day in the air raid shelter at school. After the summer holiday in September 1941 the evacuated girls from King's Warren School were sent to Bedford. Sometime later, not sure when, the school was bombed and Miss Summers, who had retired due to ill health, died. My time in Bedford was not happy and I was overjoyed when the war ended and I was able to come back to my home in Plumstead and go to my 'patched up' school at last.

The advent of the V1's & V2's over Plumstead

My mum was in bed one night when she was woken by the sound of a plane that sounded very different from any other plane that she had heard. She wasn't worried though as the air raid siren had not sounded. Then the engine stopped, it was all very odd.....the next thing she knew was a terrific explosion and she was in bed covered in broken glass with the heavy window frame pinning her down. It was one of the very first V1's (Doodle Bug) and it had fallen a few yards away, at the junction of Heavitree and Park Road. Next morning the boffins were out in force and no one was allowed near the bomb site. This was the start of the 'flying bomb' era of the war. The V1's and V2's had a much more profound effect on people as they were completely unpredictable and therefore more nerve racking than the Blitz had been, and that was bad enough. That year, as an evacuee, I was not allowed home for the summer holiday. Mum and I had a fortnights holiday with relatives in Devon. Poor mum was in an awful state and she couldn't stop shaking. She worked at St Nicholas Hospital and had been in a room that was destroyed in a flying bomb attack. Fortunately for her, the door had fallen on her and given her some protection. Rescuers lifted the door and out she crawled. She was treated for shock and minor injuries and put to bed in one of the remaining wards. However, she didn't stay there long, instead she got up and started to help with the rescue work.

Our family was so lucky though during the war. Five members saw active service in the forces and the rest lived in London, yet we all survived unhurt.

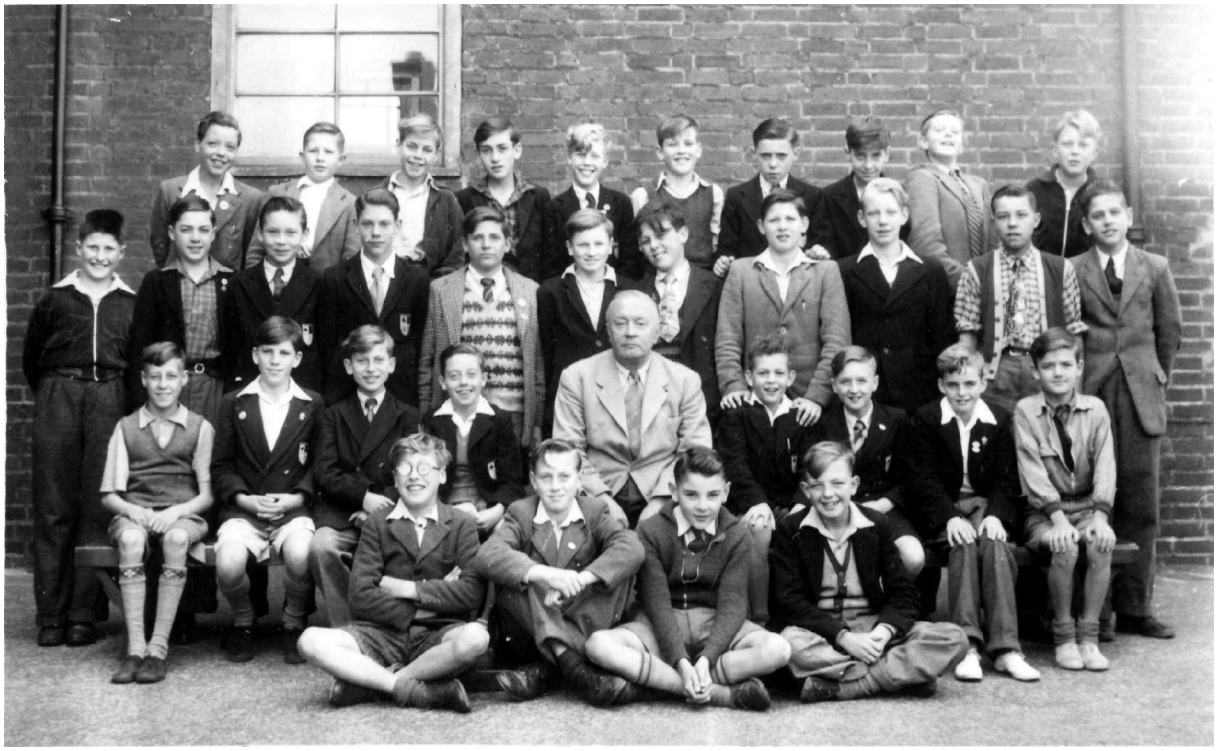
From the windows of our flat we had a marvellous view of the Thames. One of my lasting memories is of the Thames Barges with their lovely red sails sailing so majestically on the river.

I would love to hear from anyone who can also remember those happy times.

Childhood Memories Living In Abbey Wood & Plumstead

Kenneth Rowden

I was born 26th March 1941 in the middle of a German air raid 'on a wing and a prayer' courtesy of the Luftwaffe. I was baptised at St Margaret's Church, Plumstead, April 1941, I took the 11 Plus Exam locally and failed to get into the Roan Grammar School and ending up at Wickham Lane Secondary School, Plumstead.



Wickham Lane School, form 2a (Mr Waites form teacher). I'm in front, sitting second from right.

Tram Sheds Depot,
Abbey Wood, under construction
1910.
(Photo courtesy GLC Records)

I lived in Abbey Wood with mum and dad and sisters Christine and Linda, not far from the Tram Depot at 34 Broderick Grove, off McLeod Road. I spent many of my boyhood days down at the tram depot; I still miss the old trams. The house was a 3 bedroom terrace house and was part of the large 2500 Co-Op estate of houses built around 1910 complete with Co-Op shop units covering a grocery, chemist, drapery and bakers etc; almost a self sufficient community.

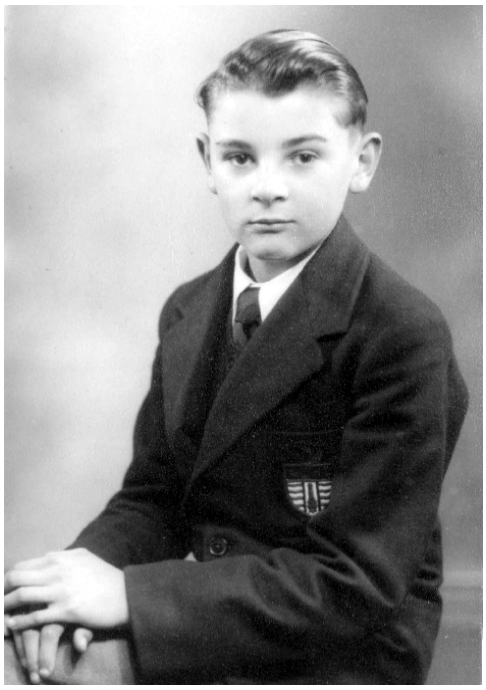
VE Day street party in Parry Place, off Plumstead High Street.

My granddad lived at No 19 Parry Place in Plumstead and I went to the VE Day street party celebrations, which were held there celebrating the end of the war in Europe.

I attended Wickham Lane School from 1952-1954 and then the Woolwich poly from 1954 – 1957. I had a part time job on Saturdays with Alderton's the bakers up on the common and on Saturdays again at the Woolwich surplus stores down by the ferry.

The Junior/Infant School at Bostall Lane was an awesome imposing towering structure which to a small child seemed to dominate the view of the hillside. Everywhere, discipline was firm and retribution for misdemeanour's swift. This approach was followed at Wickham Lane with a tighter regime. However, I thought that this school set me on to the road to success. Practical subjects like woodwork and metalwork was well taught by good teachers like Mr Bennett, Wally Woodworm, Sam Dunham and art by Headmaster A P Evans. My form-master was Mr Waites, an ex Indian Colonial teacher who left India after 1948 Independence. His special subject was mathematics; he also taught music and trained the school choir. My form also basically formed the background of the choir and no exception was permitted. Singing lessons were mandatory and woe betide pupils who chose to sing alternative words e.g. (Kookaburra 'shits' on the tree). Again retribution was very quick, the piano halted and

the lid slammed shut, a name was shouted out; the cane was produced and penalties dished out. A memorable occasion occurred in 1952/3 year in a singing competition held at another of Plumstead's larger schools. Mr Waites invited all those in the class to join him with extra tuition, endeavouring us to try and win a place in the competition. The 696 Trolleybus provided transport there and back. I cannot remember the placing of Mr Waites choir, but there was great jubilation on the way back as several choir members took to the upper deck and without adequate supervision, decided to give all the upper seats of the trolleybus a dust removal exercise. The bus braked to a sudden standstill and the driver with Mr Waites in toe rushing upstairs. Names were noted and a very flustered Mr Waites humbly apologised and assured the driver punishment would be swift and it was indeed. On return to the school after normal hours, I was given the honour of collecting the cane from Mr Evans the Headmaster complete with punishment book. The twenty or so names were duly entered, along with 2/3 strokes each. It was the largest single entry ever carried out at the same event! At thirteen years old, I took another exam and passed to Woolwich Polytechnic School to sit GCSE's and thus onto higher National Certs and a career at Ford's Engine Design Team based at Dagenham, Essex.



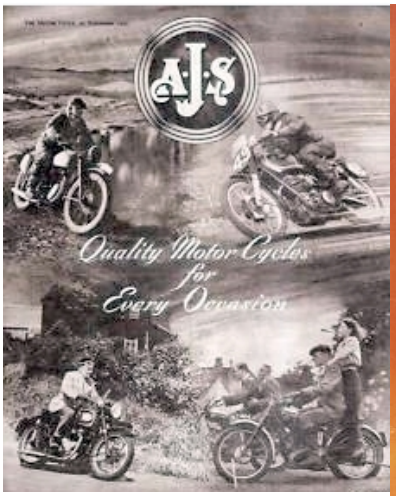
Ken, 1st day at Woolwich Polytechnic,1954.

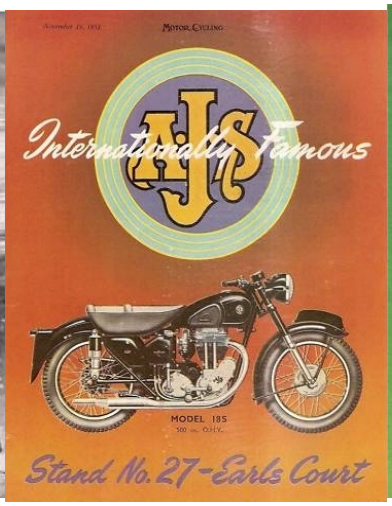
COLLIER & 'MATCHLESS' MOTORCYCLES - A FAMILY BUSINESS

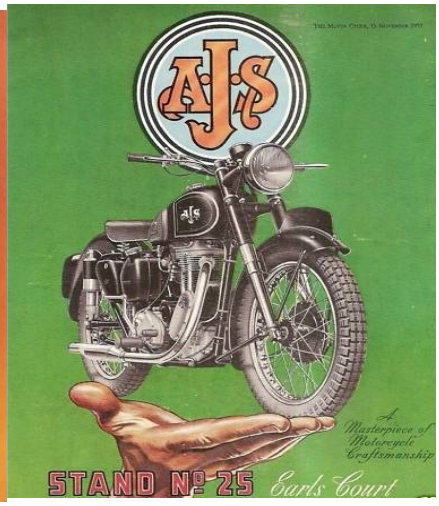
At the time during the 1930s/40s, it was the world's largest factory, devoted to the manufacture of motorcycles - AJS, Matchless and latterly Norton. My grandfather, father, mother, uncle and aunt all worked there. Dad and granddad in heat treatment, uncle as electrician and mum in accounts and my aunt gold lined the tanks. Socially, the employees' children had a super Christmas party each year with clowns and a toy at the end. During the summer weekends, coaches were hired for works' outings to Margate, Hearne Bay, Whitstable etc., Lewis and Bradshaw coaches were a real treat for weekends in the long summer days. My dad also took me to Brands Hatch motor cycle course when firms bikes were racing. When I graduated to the Woolwich Poly at McBean Street, I used to spend many school lunch hours inspecting the finished bikes awaiting testing. I remember the works outings with Lewis's Bradshaw's coaches to Margate with the Matchless Factory.

The Motor Cycle cover for 1948 shows my grandfather at work hardening tools.

It is all a long time ago now, my age is 68 but the memory and pictures are intense. I am currently living in Lutterworth in the Midlands, 90 miles up the M1.







Childhood Memories Of London Blitz

Doreen Clayson (nee Graham)

I was thirteen years old in September 1939 when war broke out. My sister was 10 years-old and we lived in Abbey Wood, a quiet village, on the edge of London and Kent.

Some months earlier my father and his friend had dug a huge hole at the bottom of the back garden into which they placed our Anderson Shelter, which was steel and shaped like an arch and earth was placed on the top and all around it.

About a week before the declaration of war, my sister and I were evacuated with my school, Kings Warren Grammar, to Maidstone in Kent. The day war was declared the air raid siren sounded, but it was a mistake.

Maidstone was not safe, as we later had hit and run raids because we were so near the coast. London had not had any raids at this time and my sister, Audrey, and I were homesick, so we asked our mum to take us back and I wasn't well as I had chilblains up to my knees and didn't know what they were. We didn't want to be evacuated again, so we stayed in the suburbs of London.

One Saturday in September we had raids all day — the day the Battle of Britain began — and we cheered and cheered our planes that were fighting the Germans overhead. It was a beautiful sunny afternoon, the barrage balloons had been taken down a short time earlier, so we knew there was something afoot. They were taken down so that our planes could go up and intercept the enemy ones.

We stayed in the Anderson shelter for hours, we being mum and dad, me and my sister. It got so damp in there that condensation was running off the walls.

My dad said that if jerry comes back tonight we've had it. And lo and behold we had just prepared something to eat when the siren started up and we were in the shelter all that night and many, many more nights. As soon as it was dark the sirens would sound and then all night the drone, drone, drone of the bombers and then the explosions.

We had deck chairs to sleep on at first, and then the council came and fixed us up with some bunks. I can still hear the drone of the engines of the bombers to this day.

We still went to school part-time and did our homework in the shelter.

Then we had the doodlebugs. It was fine while you could hear the engines, but when they stopped they just glided down. I was about sixteen by then and I was walking back from Sunday school one afternoon when I heard a doodlebug overhead. Then its engine cut out and it went into a steep dive. I hurried on home thinking it had fallen on our house, but it was the houses in the road behind that were hit. My mum, thinking it was going to be a quiet day, was just getting into the bath. All our windows and doors were blown out by the blast, and there was my mum without a stitch on.

Then we had the rockets which were very frightening. We had a dog called 'Bonnie' and every afternoon during the war he would walk down the garden and go into the shelter and stay in his corner all night. Then one night he wouldn't go down there — we all went in as it was a foul night, pouring with rain — and we didn't have a raid that night. Animals are

clever; he must have had a premonition.

I thank God we all came through safely, although I never thought we would. Even after the war when the Royal Arsenal in Woolwich tested the guns. 'Bonnie' would go under the stairs — as the Anderson was long gone — and I had to sing the all clear for him to come out.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

A family entering their Anderson air raid shelter in their back garden with their gas mask cases. Top photo: Children stepping into their Anderson shelter.

Childhood Memories Of War In Woolwich & Plumstead

Iris Emily Bryen

I was five years old and living in Eastmoor Street, Woolwich, when World War II started in 1939. Little did people realise that it would last for six years – six terrible years! I don't think us children were fully aware of the possibility that we could be killed at any time, but our parents were, what a dreadful existence.

Me aged 8 years old taken in Jeromes photo shop Powis Street, Woolwich, 1942

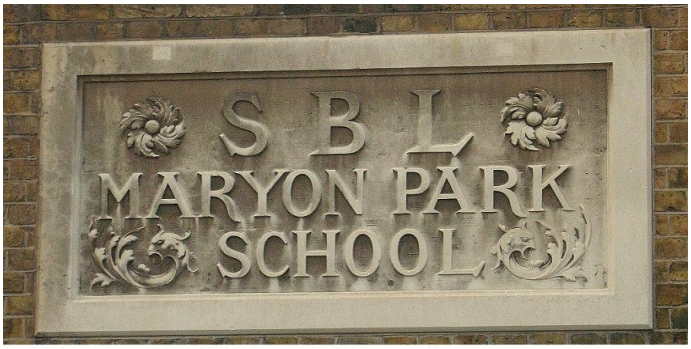
My dad was called up in 1940 and joined the Royal Artillery as a Bombardier. His army number was 1771683. I can still remember him coming home on leave for the first time in his uniform. I was out walking with my soldier dad when an Officer approached us and my dad saluted him, I was very surprised! My dad was very proud to be in the army.

I was only six years old, my brother Alan would be eight, when our mum went to work in the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich. We didn't have child minders then, Alan and I were on our own, as lots of other kids were at that time. Mum loved working in the Arsenal making bombs and bullets from 6am to 6pm and got very good money, £6.00 per week! My brother was a fantastic child and he needed to grow up overnight, he did it well. He had a local paper round early in the morning to earn a few coppers. During the blackout he would light the fire with firewood and newspaper every night, before mum came home from work. We used to put a little bit of sugar on the fire if it wouldn't light and there would be a big whoosh as the flames shot up the chimney, which made us jump and laugh our heads off. Mum would get off the tram at 6.30pm and we would be there to meet her. Alan with a large black torch so that we could see our way. We met mum every night because she was frightened to walk past the churchyard in the dark on her own. St Nicholas Church was just round the corner from our house in Brookdene Road, Plumstead. We had been bombed out of our house in Eastmoor Street and moved to a flat in nearby Abbey Wood which was too small, so we moved to a modern 'requisitioned house' in Brookdene Road. Any empty house in the war was taken over by the government and

Saint Nicholas Church 29th Sept 2009 viewed from St Nicholas Road, Plumstead

given to worthy cases to rent. There were lots of requisitioned houses because people were leaving London to live somewhere 'safer', if that was possible!

Before moving to Brookdene Road, I remember when a bomb fell on the house opposite ours in Eastmoor Street. The blast blew in all the windows of our house and blew the doors off their hinges. We were in the house at the time. It was winter, the middle of the night and I remember the torrential rain. I sat up in bed and couldn't stop screaming. I was covered in and surrounded by broken glass. A fireman rescued me, he was soaking wet and shouted for me to keep still as he gently lifted me out of the glass. We were taken to a local factory being used as a temporary refuge, along with our neighbours.



Maryon Park School plaque above entrance now part of Holborn College 29.09.09

Another memory that my brother recalls is an occasion when he and I were walking home from Maryon Park School down Hardens Manor Way and past the 'Drum Field', a field full of supply drums enclosed by a high wall. An enemy plane came down low and fired at the depot wall behind us. Alan pushed me to the ground and shielded me until the firing stopped and the plane flew away. My brother can remember the incident so clearly because we were both nearly killed and yet I can't recall it! Perhaps by shielding me, Alan shielded my memory of it; what a brave and wonderful brother to have. The bombing of Eastmoor Street was awful! Parents, family, friends, Air Raid Wardens, rescuers, medical people – how did they cope?

Everyone used to say 'thank God' to be spared. I vividly remember asking my mother why she said 'God Bless' every night to us as she put us to bed. She said she was asking God to bless us and keep us safe and sound from the bombing.

The Blitz on London was dreadful, especially where we lived, Brookdene Road, only a mile from the Royal Arsenal. Every night we had to get out of bed and rush down to the shelter in the garden. I remember the noise of the bombs dropping, searchlights, shrapnel falling, but still didn't want to go into the Anderson Shelter. I hated it in there with the spiders. The shelters were sunk into the ground and were always smelly and damp. The worst part for the grown-ups must have been coming out of the shelter, relieved to be alive but having to face up to reality – who had been bombed! Night after night the bombs continued to rain down on London. People would emerge from their shelters surprised that they were still alive and relieved if their house was still standing. The kids couldn't wait to scramble over any wreckage to see what they could find. Who had the largest collection of shrapnel was uppermost in the boys minds; every boy had a biscuit tin full of shrapnel. There seemed to be the constant sound of ambulances rushing the injured to

hospital, others would be buried beneath the rubble and would be rescued by voluntary workers, often only using their bare hands.

We were bombed out of our home many times and I vividly remember coming out of the shelter, going indoors only to look up in the front room and seeing blue sky through a large hole in the roof! Water pipes were broken, so we had to wait for the supply tanker to come round with clean water; everybody filled everything they had. Windows were blown in and broken glass was all around; tarpaulin sheets came from somewhere and were put over the gaping holes in the roofs. Everyone joined in and did their bit. The W.V.S. (Woman's Volunteer Service) van would come round at lunchtime with tea and rolls which were delicious. It took a lot to get a Londoner down; everyone helped and everyone a hero!

During the six years of the war, as each birthday arrived, I became more and more aware of what was happening around me. Some nights the bombing seemed to go on forever; every time there was a bang we all jumped. We were either in the smelly damp shelter or under the kitchen table or in the cupboard under the stairs. During a lull we would crawl out and rush to the toilet or grab a cushion before it all started again! I was so frightened of the bangs, mum would grab me and hold me close. I was terrorised, but felt protected when squashed against her. In the morning we would emerge to see the devastation. Houses were reduced to great mounds of rubble and everything inside, lino, curtains, crockery, pots and pans, floorboards, pictures and furniture, all broken and on view for everyone to see. Rescue workers would be on top of the heaps passing debris back down. The ambulance always waiting. I was scared who might be buried there. If a gas main had been hit the smell was awful, and broken water pipes meant water everywhere. This went on night after night, it seemed forever. I think it was the doodlebugs that had fire coming from the rear. In my minds eye I can see them now, flying low overhead, when the fire went out they would fall to the ground. Life was just chance, we were all so helpless. One sight you didn't wish to see was the 'telegram boy' on his motorbike. Which house this time and what was the bad news?

During the Blitz, mum decided that things were so bad it would be better if we were evacuated, like thousands of others. I had a friend called Barbara who went with us, quite an adventure for us three kids. We were all given labels to tie on our coats and got on a special train for evacuees at Woolwich Station. Our destination was Hale, in Cheshire. On arrival, we were allocated to a 'very posh' family who lived in a beautiful grand house; they were extremely nice to us. The RAF war hero Douglas Bader was a frequent visitor to the house. The experience was wonderful but mum was homesick for London, so after three weeks we packed our bags and came home. We arrived at the main London station and immediately back into the thick of the war! There was an air raid on and it was a particularly noisy and bad one.

But life went on; babies were born; people got married, all against a background of the raging war.

One of my good memories during these childhood years was when I was a bridesmaid for the first time. My cousin Beckie got married to a sailor. She wore a beautiful white lace dress and the bridesmaids dresses were pink lace. All were made by the local dressmaker and I felt wonderful, especially when I found out that I was able to keep the dress. Of course, we

didn't get many gifts during the war years, but I do remember that mum bought me a lovely big china doll once; on the back of her head was stamped, 'Made In Germany'. Mum and I wrapped her up in a blanket and put her in the bottom of the wardrobe where she would be protected from the bombing. The next time I saw the doll was after the war was over; she was undamaged, but I was eleven years old by then and too old to play with dolls, so she ended up sitting on a chair in my bedroom.

Infants plaque above entrance to Purrett Road School

I went to a lot of different schools in Plumstead; they were always getting bombed; so it was off to the next one! Once we went to school in a teachers house, very posh, with a large highly polished oak table for us to sit around for our lessons. During the middle of the war I used to have my breakfast and dinner at school, Purrett Road School. The school had a big basement which was full of bunk beds with chintz cotton covers on them. Quite posh really. These were used by bombed out families during night times. Daytime, when there was an air raid during lessons, we children were quickly ushered down to the basement by the teachers. The art teacher would get us all drawing and I loved it; we forgot all the noise of the falling bombs. But tragedy was never far away and a school friend of mine was buried in rubble for over half a day when her house was bombed. Rescuers were ordinary people talking to her, asking her to talk back. She told the men that her mum and grandmother were with her, but that they weren't answering her. She didn't know that they were both dead.

School holidays were great; all the kids dads were in the forces and all the mums were working, so we were on our own. Plumstead Gardens was a play area behind Brookdene Road, but we mostly made camps to play in; lots of scope with all the bomb damaged houses standing empty. You had to be careful of the Air Raid Wardens though, they would chase us from the bomb sites because of the danger. Us girls would walk miles up to Woolwich and go across the ferry to North Woolwich, sometimes taking our dolls prams with us. My brother Alan would go with his mates to the docks. Food was scarce, but we cooked for ourselves and if the corner shop was due a

Plumstead Gardens on north side of Brookdene Road 29.09.09

delivery, mum would leave us some money and tell us to queue up – first come first served was the motto. Lots of people had fruit trees in their gardens and the boys would creep in, climb the trees and throw the fruit down to the girls, there was always a 'lookout'. Apples, pears, plums, cherries to eat – how wonderful.

Alan and I did better than most kids because mum was able to buy 'black market' food in the Arsenal. That didn't stop Alan from bringing home a bunch of bananas one night after he'd been to Woolwich Docks. I don't even remember having a banana before that; mum and I looked at them as if they were pure gold. Absolutely delicious to eat and we all sat around the open fire watching the skins burn. Alan also got news of a shipment of 'coal eggs' arriving at the docks. Mum gave us money and we went with my dolls pram next day to stand in line. The queue was so long you couldn't see the end, news had spread fast! When we did reach the head of the queue a big docker weighed out the coal eggs on huge iron scales and tipped them into my dolls pram for the long trek home.

When peace was declared, everyone took to the streets, unless you had a loved one in the Far East, peace in Japan would come later. Every street had a party and everyone pitched in. Jellies, cakes, sandwiches, we were still on rationing, so where did all the food come from? Tables and chairs down the middle of the road, barrels of beer and pianos in the front gardens. Our piano was out there a long time; mum was very popular and could play all the old songs. People sang and danced the night away. We had a fancy dress parade and running races in Brookdene Road; I can remember winning one race! There was a firework display late at night, a spent casing fell on my head and burnt my scalp – the things you remember!

What a joyous time for everyone. I was eleven years old when the war ended.

1939 - 1945

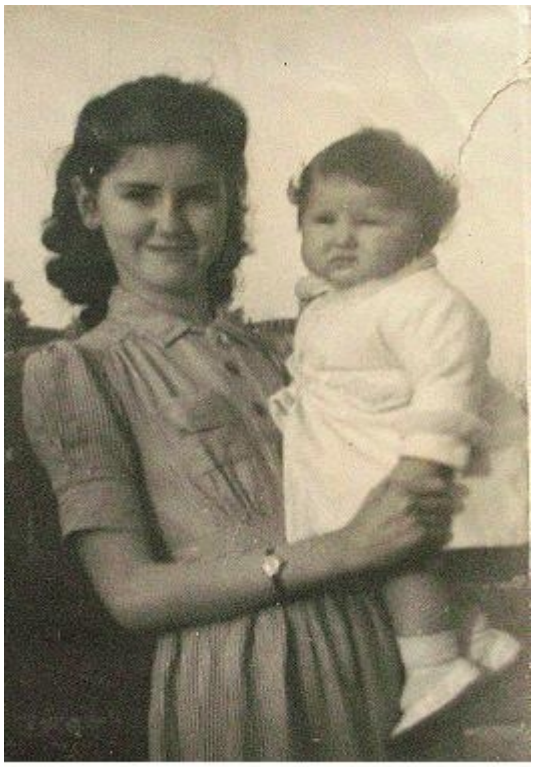
Let us pray for everlasting peace,
And let us always seek the truth,
Let us remember those who fell,
And those who lost their youth.

Let us be everything we can be,
For those who fought and died,
That we may walk in freedom,
Our thoughts with them abide.

Community Life In Woolwich & Plumstead

By Iris Allen (nee Bryen)

Growing up in Woolwich and Plumstead was a time of very mixed emotions for me. I was five years old when World War II began and living in Eastmoor Street, Woolwich. Being so close to the dockyards and Woolwich Arsenal meant that the area came under constant bombing raids by German aircraft. It was a frightening time for everybody, awful sights and terrible news became commonplace. Sadly many people lost their lives and some of those brave husbands and sons serving overseas would never return to the area. Many homes were destroyed, reduced to mounds of rubble where local kids would explore before being chased off by the Air Raid Warden. Amidst this fear and upheaval though, daily life went on, and I do look back fondly on the strength of family during those hard times and the resilience and camaraderie of local folk determined not to be beaten by the constant war barrage. Neighbours weren't strangers then and doors were always open with a warm welcome, people rallied round when help was needed.



Me aged 13 and my sister Marilyn aged 11 months - taken in the back garden of our house in Brookdene Road, Plumstead in 1948

Focal points of community life were the theatre, cinema and the many local pubs and shops that were so important in creating a sense of 'normality' during the troubled times.

I spent many lovely evenings with my mother and brother at the Woolwich Empire Theatre in Beresford Road; it had an ornate interior with seating on three levels and boxes at the sides overlooking the stage. Unfortunately this lovely building was closed in 1959 and demolished the following year for the construction of a petrol station and a car park!

The Kinema Picture House on the corner of Plumstead High Street and Garibaldi Road was another welcome escape from the reality of the times. Saturday morning picture shows for the children would be a riot of noise and commotion whilst evening performances were a chance for families to relax from the daily tensions; remember no television to steal family life in those days! The picture house, like the theatre, outlived the war years but was finally closed in September 1960.

Local pubs were places where people would gather to laugh and sing away the night if bombing raids would allow! Us kids would congregate outside listening to the chatter and noise, waiting for a glass of lemonade or a packet of crisps with the little blue salt sachet

inside. 'Old-fashioned' pubs where everyone knew everyone else and where the landlord was everybody's friend. The theatre, kinema and pubs were so important to the folk of Woolwich and Plumstead, they provided much needed respite from their daily lives which had been overtaken by the horrors of war.

Shops then were real community shops, used as places for bumping into friends and passing on local gossip and news as much as for buying the essentials of daily life. When I was small, mum would take me to Maynard's sweet shop in Powis Street, Woolwich. I remember the fondant creams displayed in the window, various shapes, beautiful soft colours. A delight to eat, albeit a rare one! Every week mum took me to another shop in Powis Street; the name of which escapes me but the front of the shop was a tobacconist selling cigarettes, cigars, roll your own tobaccos, pipes etc. The smell was very pungent, very tobacco orientated. Mum and I wouldn't stop there though; we went through a door at the rear of the shop into a small compact library. It smelt musty of tobacco and old books. I liked being in there with all the books and I think that mum would pay a few coppers to borrow the books, she always chose romantic novels!

During the war, in Beresford Square, Woolwich, there was a large cake shop called Lyon's. We would queue up for ages to buy delicious pieces of Madeira cake topped with cream. The cake would be cut and then weighed on scales to determine the price. Close by was Manze's pie and eel shop. The eels were alive and kicking in a big tank in the shop front. I wouldn't eat jellied eels because I didn't like the look of them, but the pie and mash was a different story! As a little girl, always hungry, it was a treat for me and I remember the pie and mash being delicious. Evidently the recipe for the pies was a family secret never to be divulged!

My brother Alan aged 9 months taken in 1932 at Alexanders Studios, 64 Powis Street, Woolwich, S.E.18

After the war, when I was about twelve years old, I remember a particular shoe shop in Plumstead High Street. I wish that I could recall the name of it, Dadd's or Gadd's? I think it was opposite the Green Man public house. One day, there in the front of the window, was a pair of beautiful black patent sandals. I looked in awe and fell in love with them; I think the price was six shillings. I immediately started saving the small amount of pocket money that mum and dad could afford to give us and every time I passed the shop I would hold my breath, hoping that they hadn't been sold! This went on for weeks until eventually I could buy the sandals and I remember walking on air, as I clutched the shoe box under my arm on the way home.

It was normal then for families to visit local photographic studios to have pictures taken and I remember one in particular that my family used. Alexander's studio was at 64 Powis Street, Woolwich and I have a lovely photograph of my brother Alan just 11 months old taken there in 1932, I was yet to be born! Another photograph taken at Alexander's has particular sentimental value for me. My mother took myself and my brother to the studio in 1940 for a family photograph which she then sent to my father who was serving in the Royal Artillery at the time. He carried the photograph (below) with him during the war years and was thankfully able to carry it safely back home when eventually he left the service.

Growing up in Woolwich and Plumstead during the 1930's and 40's was a difficult time; family bonds were particularly important. My mother and father must have worried so much but were able to support and guide the family safely through the war years. My older bother Alan was wonderfully supportive and I can't imagine growing up without him being around. My sister Marilyn was born in 1947 when I was 13 years old; I adored her and felt very protective towards her having just experienced the war years. Family life was the cornerstone of the local community; theatres, cinemas, pubs and shops were so important in supporting that community and provided a sense of normality to the area during what were very abnormal times. I am very proud of my family, for the bonds that held strong throughout those years, and very proud of the Woolwich and Plumstead community for the resilience it showed in the face of extreme difficulties!

Coronation Celebrations In Tuam Road,1953

Su McArthur (nee Hogben)

When the Coronation was taking place in central London, several of the inhabitants of Tuam Road crowded round our small, black and white television, recently acquired so that dad could see the cup final. It was a cold, damp day and we were glad that we were not out in the horrible weather in the streets to see the real thing. I was seven and very excited. People had grown red, white and blue flowers in their gardens and you can guess what colour dresses were most popular for girls that year!

At Plumcroft School we had all been taught the song, "In a golden coach, there's a heart of gold" and were presented with a souvenir. I cannot now recall whether we had a mug from school and a crown coin from the street party... or was it the other way round?

A street party was arranged. There was a fancy dress parade at Timbercroft School. I went as a gipsy and my friend, Hilda Mitchell, went as a shepherdess. Then there was a sports competition at Shrewsbury Park for the children, where I proudly came second in the egg and spoon race, the only 'sport' I am ever likely to excel at, being slow and solid rather than swift and speedy!.There was a talent show for the children, followed by a tea in the street. There was much red,white and blue crepe paper around, and, in the evening, some sort of makeshift stage had been erected for the adult talent show.

Tuam Street Coronation Party Events committee members;
Back row L-R: Mr Tozer, Len Hogben, Ted Akerman.
Front row L-R: ??, Ken Murphy, Joe Ward, Olive ?, ??.

Standing L-R: Mr Tozer, ??, Rev. Sharples-Davis of St Mark's Church, Iris Murphy, ??, (clown)Mr Lockyer, Len Hogben, Joan Hogben, Ted Akerman, ??, ??, ??.
Seated L-R: ??, ??, Ken Murphy, Joe ward, Olive ?, ??.

A great deal of hard work and preparation went into these events. There was a committee, who laboured for weeks to make the day the success that it was. My parents, Len and Joan Hogben, were involved and I recall my dad being very disappointed because he tried to get the famous runner Roger Bannister, who was the fastest man in the world to run the mile, to present the prizes, but he was unavailable, however, we had MP Christopher Mayhew instead, which was pretty impressive. I attach the pictures I have of the committee; sadly I don't recall many names now, maybe other readers can help out here?

Destination Unknown

Elizabeth Goodrich

Our parents made the decision, if war came the girls would be evacuated with their school, but their son, a babe in arms, must stay at home in London. The papers were signed. Rumours of war abated and the family dispersal was temporarily forgotten.

In the late summer of 1939, with war imminent the 'takers' of the Government safety option were summoned to their dispersal points. We attended Eglington Road Infant/Junior School and on Friday morning September 1st 1939, our mother took us to the school. She carried our small cases whilst we, our gas masks stored in their brown cardboard boxes slung over our shoulders and carrying our packed lunches, trudged alongside to join the children assembling in the school playground. We were divided into two groups; juniors who had a younger brother or sister joined them in the infant group. A label, giving my name and address was tied through a buttonhole in my coat and each child was given a brown paper carrier bag which contained emergency rations. I, with my trappings of war — label, gas mask, packed lunch and rations — was ready to move. Luggage stowed, farewell kisses, tears, children and staff boarded the charabancs, we were off, destination unknown.

First stop Woolwich Arsenal Station for the train to London Bridge Station. Here we changed trains and, lugging our own cases, transferred platforms to board the special train which would take us to our secret rendezvous! We were a noisy group, nerves and excitement affected us all, some were laughing and shouting, but others cried bitterly. Out of town, into the countryside the train travelled and eventually slowly crossed a bridge which spanned a stretch of water, great excitement, were we going to the seaside? The train stopped at a station and the 'readers' shouted "it's Queenborough!" Under supervision the carriage doors were opened, kids and luggage gradually assembled on the platform. A local reception group took charge and, following instructions, the infant and junior groups boarded separate buses. Our teacher's told us that we were on the Isle of Sheppey and we were going to Halfway House School. A short drive and the bus stopped outside a single-storey school, protected by a large playground area. We left the bus and helped with our luggage, which we lined-up in the playground; we went into the school for 'watering and refreshments'.

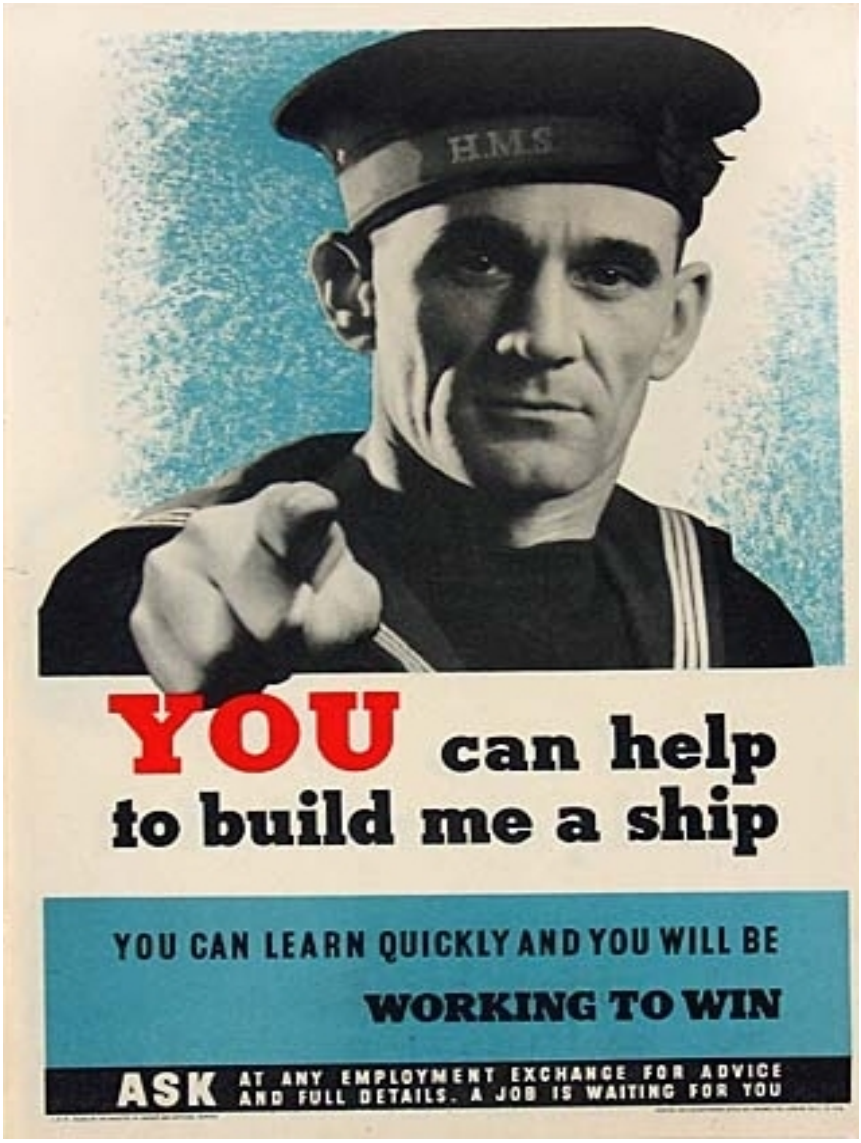
Outside again, we claimed our cases and, unaware that we were being appraised by local volunteer helpers, my sister and I stood with our cousins surveying the scene. Two white-haired ladies approached our little group and introduced themselves as our new foster-mothers — I thought they looked older than my Gran ! Mrs Hill took June and I , my cousins went with her sister. I was soon to learn that Mrs Hill was a childless retired Headmistress and her husband a retired Civil Servant and we invaded their home!

Next morning, after breakfast, Mrs Hill directed me into the sitting room and told me to sit down. She explained that she had invited June and I into her home !

Next morning, after breakfast, Mrs Hill directed me into the sitting room and told me to sit down. She explained that she had invited June and I into her home because we looked clean and tidy but she needed other information. "Do you have any lice — head fleas?" she queried. "Do you wash your hands after using the toilet?" Crack — I felt that my face had

been slapped; how dare she ask these questions. Full of indignation and responsible for my six-year-old sister, I, the eldest just eleven, had to defend our family honour — it was then I realised that I was alone!

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'



Diane Smith, nee Jones, Remembers

I don't know exactly what date we celebrated, but it is safe to say it must have been May or June in 1945.

I just cannot imagine how the mums got the food together. Presumably by using their resourcefulness and powers of improvisation honed during the years of deprivation. We never fully appreciated what brave, strong women our mothers were.

I cannot remember a lot about the event, but remember being very excited. In my innocence I truly believed that now that the war was over, I wouldn't have to go to school again and that we would be able to have all the sweets we could eat. Ha! fat chance.

Later on, I can remember the VJ party held in the St Margaret's Hall, where we later went to Brownies and Guides. I believe that the hall is now part of the school. My grandmother catered for the VJ party. She made a wonderful fruit cake and my grandfather iced the cake, a wonder of red, white and blue. At that time they were living in Vicarage Park, No 7 I think. They had been living in Scarborough where my grandfather had commanded an RA Battery at Carnelian Bay. They came back down south as the war was ending and he was retired from the RA. My mother's family had Royal Artillery connections, back to my great grandfather who had served in India with the 17th Field artillery. He died whilst living in Back Lane, off Ogilby Street, Woolwich.

The children of today do not know how lucky they are, but why should they? I look back at my childhood and teens and find a lot to be thankful for. But we never tell the people responsible, do we?

Thanks mum and dad, wherever you are, and all the neighbours and 'aunties'. and 'uncles' who gave us our childhood, in spite of all the privations.

Diane, holding her doll, at 15 Blandon Terrace, Plumstead Common.

The VE party, which was held on the waste ground created when a land mine took houses in Wernbrook Street and Plumstead Common Road.
The little girl to the right of the Union Jack at the front left is Shirley Westpfel. Her family lived over Webb's Stores (now Delray's) corner of Plumstead Common Road and Blendon Terrace. Looking at the party from the street, you can see the very badly bomb damaged houses which are on Plumstead Common Road. They were later demolished and new houses were built, one now facing into Wernbrook Road and the other now facing onto Plumstead Common Road.
The lady standing 6th from the left wearing a suit and dark blouse is my mother, Irene Jones, her hands are on my little brothers shoulders, his name is Peter Jones.
The photo above is of the VE party, which was held on the waste ground created when a land mine took houses in Wernbrook Street and Plumstead Common Road,

Front row, middle of picture, blond boy is Roy Bish. It was his brother Alfie who was killed by lightning along with Ray Elliott. (See story; Killed By Lightning in Vol 1 of Common Folk.)
5th and 6th girls to the right of him are Eileen and Jean his sisters. The family lived at No 8 Wernbrook Street. To the left of the photo, 4th girl back from front is me, Diane Jones (as I was named then), not the one with dark hair. Almost opposite me, 3rd boy up from Roy Bish, is Brian Potter who wrote the story 'Killed By Lightning' in Vol 1 of Common Folk.

The table setting, goodness knows how the mum's rustled up the food for the party. I can't remember much about it except for the jelly and the spam sandwiches, but it was so exciting. The house wall, that you can see the writing on, is where Ray Elliott lived. You can just see a couple of the boys helping with the chairs. The lady with the pushchair is Joan Tarrant and her eldest son Michael is in the pushchair. (Michael has submitted photos for book 'Common Folk) My mother is far right, next to Mrs Hettie Westpfel, with me – white bow in front next to Rita Westpfel.

Me, when I was Diane Jones living at 15 Blandon Terrace, Plumstead Common, outside our house and the little boy with dark hair on the right of the photo is my brother Peter Jones' later known as 'Buck'.

We have many happy memories of our childhood whilst living in Plumstead. That is, my younger brother Peter and I. We lived on the edge of the Common at 15 Blendon Terrace. Some of them are

perforce of wartime memories. Just near our house on the common was a Barrage Balloon unit and I remember being fascinated by them. It seems that I used to call them 'pigs', don't ask me why, because looking back, it seems to me that they looked more like elephants. There were huge concrete Tank Traps: does anyone out there remember them? After the war,when we were older, we used to jump from one to the next, all the way down the hill from St John's Terrace to the back fence of the last house, next to the Common on the church side. I was warned by my father never to do that, so, when I fell badly between them, I tried to creep indoors and hide the evidence, which was pretty dumb because I had a great hole in my leg and you could see my kneecap! My dad found me and used his own version of first aid- neat iodine...ouch!!!! Needless to say, my mum made him take me to St Nick's outpatients for treatment and, after that, I was in disgrace and grounded for a week. No sympathy for me.

Eaglesfield Park swimming pool. *Photo: e-shootershill.co.uk*

When it snowed we spent many happy days and evenings sliding down the steep slopes of the Common on a chair back. Coming home with red noses and cold feet but with our blood tingling and pounding in our ears. Our dad was a great believer in walking as it was good for your health and by golly he walked some distances, but that way we got to see a lot of the area. When we were older we would go to Winn's Common Paddling Pool on our own, a big group of us, and also up to the paddling pool at Eaglesfield Park, at the top of Plum Lane. We spent many happy hours there with jam sammies and a bottle of water, which we shared between us until the water was murky and full of crumbs and stuff. We didn't care though. And what about when we went to Shrewsbury Park for bluebell picking...not allowed now I am afraid. I suppose it is our fault that the bluebells never came back; well not in a big way, because we never picked them, we pulled them up. Well, nobody told us! Went home proud as anything with armfuls of the things for our mums. We spent many happy hours picking blackberries (and eating them, which meant I spent the night on the toilet!) finally going home dirty and scratched but with bags of blackberries. Our mums would make blackberry and apple pies and lovely jams. How about that for the 'Good Life'. In many ways it was like

living in the country in those days and there was that 'country' feel to the place. We went to St Margaret's School on the Common and I well remember walking all the way from there to Plumstead Baths for our swimming lessons. Not a lot of fun in the cold weather though, when coming back. We spent a lot of time at the church too, because we celebrated things like Easter and Mother's Day and Christmas with a school assembly in Church. I was always picked to read the lesson. Ooer, it made my knees knock. I wonder if it is as nice to live there nowadays?

My brother mentions an aircraft crashing (about 1953?) I actually saw that plane coming down. After it had crashed I found what turned out to be a petrol cap (not from the plane it turns out) on the Common. It was very hot so I gave it to a teacher at school, they called the police and they took it away. *(See story; Aeroplane Crash Over Plumstead. Vol 1, Common folk.)*

Also, I recall the "Mickey Mouse Rock", which is supposed to be where the Ice Age glaciers stopped their progress?

Below: Diane's brother Peter and friends early 1960's at a local watering hole, the Hilltop cafe, in Crescent

Road, many happy memories!!!

Also, during the summer holidays, we used to have a Movie Van come around and show cartoons on the Common.

Early 1960's with my brother Peter Jones in his car and with his friends on bikes. Taken outside 13 Blandon Terrace.

Dog Fight Over Woolwich And Plumstead

Extracts from stories in the Winter edition of 'Friends Of The Few'.

Newsletter of The Battle Of Britain Museum, Shoreham near Sevenoaks in Kent.

High above Woolwich and the surrounding areas of East London during the early evening of Saturday 31st August 1940, a dog-fight was raging in the sky between Supermarine Spitfires and Messerschmitt Me109's, the RAF and Luftwaffe fighter pilots determinedly trying to gain an upper-hand against their adversary. With gathering crowds of witnesses on streets and vantage points south of the River Thames from Charlton to Plumstead, they watched transfixed as one of the planes from the aerial jousting fell away downwards. Many cheered, thinking it was a German plane including the then sixteen years old Mary Buckingham (née Garvey) and her little brother Ron aged six. Looking up at the falling plane from near their home on Shooters Hill, they thought it was going to crash onto houses, but as many other witnesses would testify, they felt the poor pilot had steered his stricken aircraft away before it crashed into the middle of Repository Road right outside the gates of the Army barracks.

Bubbles Spitfire, a water colour by Geoff Nutkins, curator of the Shoreham Aircraft Museum.

Another young witness was our late and much-missed Museum co- founder Frank Nutkins, who was watching events from his home in Plumstead. He however also saw a Messerschmitt fighter plunge down close by and he raced off like any excited teenager to see the aftermath of the crashed enemy plane close-up. Sadly, the first doomed aircraft was a Spitfire and in all likelihood the tragic pilot was either already dead or unconscious before the RAF fighter crashed and drilled itself into the road, a victim of a deadly Me109. Later that evening, young Mary and Ron joined a crowd of locals gathered around the crash site cordon, now realising that a brave RAF fighter pilot had died and they offered a prayer for him.

At about 7pm, the Spitfires of 603 'City of Edinburgh' Squadron started to land back at Hornchurch after their scrap with the force of Me109's and were concerned to find two of their number were missing. Happily, Pilot Officer George Gilroy had managed to bale out of

his Spitfire X4271XT-N (though he was injured after being set upon by enraged civilians thinking he was an enemy pilot); but when the Squadron learnt that the ever popular Flying Officer 'Bubble' Waterston was lost in his Spitfire X4273XT-K, it devastated every member of the proud Scottish Auxiliary Squadron.

Robin McGregor Waterston was born in Edinburgh in January 1917,one of eight children He joined the Squadron as a Pilot Officer in February 1937 Saturday 31st August; a handwritten note under Bubble's last report simply says, "This pilot has since been killed."

The pitiful remains of Bubble recovered from Repository Road were returned to his devastated family in Edinburgh and cremated at Warriston Cemetery where he is commemorated the Royal Artillery Quartermaster. Despite being stationed at Woolwich for many years, Major Gleeson was unaware of the tragic event that had taken place outside the barrack gates almost 70 years ago and he was as keen as the Museum to see the RAF pilot honoured. Eventually, an unveiling date with the agreement of Major Gleeson was arrived at along with a place to set the memorial stone, which was within a fenced off area just yards from where Bubble fatally crashed. With the Army's tight schedule, some feverish work was required just days before the unveiling to actually set the stone in place and so it was down to Anthony, Dean, Geoff and Rob to accomplish the task, which they admirably did, much to the satisfaction of the Major. The efficient Museum team were close to getting signed up to join the 3rd Foot & Mouth Regiment to help sort out the trouble - some Khasi and his Burpas! On the pleasantly bright early afternoon of Tuesday 29th September 2009, guests and members of the public began to gather in Repository Road at the entrance into the Royal Artillery Barracks to see a long overdue honour paid to brave young RAF fighter pilot. With Cadets from 56 (Woolwich) Squadron, Air Training Corps flanking the RAF ensign draped, observed silence followed, despite some noise from passing road traffic until Reveille sounded. After further prayers and a blessing, wreaths were laid in front of the newly unveiled memorial with Tony doing the honours for the Museum, Harold Bennett for 603 Squadron and representatives from the Air Training Corps and the RAFA to place their tributes.

The story of the shot down Me 110 Messerschmitt over Plumstead.

Twenty minutes after the raid on Hornchurch, 603 Squadron were ordered up for their fourth Defensive Patrol of the day with orders to orbit base at 12,000 feet. Led by Flight Lieutenant Ken MacDonald, twelve Spitfires raced into the air leaving one of their number behind who was struggling to get started. The pilot still stranded on the ground was Sergeant Jack Stokoe, a fresh-faced twenty-year old from Durham, who had joined the Squadron in early July and two days previously, made his first combat claim for damaging a Me109 over Manston.

With the Squadron well ahead of him, Sgt Stokoe eventually took off and turned west towards the sun as he climbed in his Spitfire X4250XT-X as fast as possible to try and catch up with his flying colleagues. He found that he had a long climb as the Squadron were now circling at 28,000 feet, but caught up with them over Southend. Moments later and just before 6:30pm, a formation of Me109's were spotted 2,000 feet higher up heading in the direction of London and without hesitation, the thirteen Spitfires attacked. Very quickly the RAF and

Luftwaffe fighters became a tangled dog-fighting mass high in the sky above Woolwich, but Sgt Stokoe caught sight of two Messerschmitts above him and putting the propeller into full fine pitch climbed after them; the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine giving all it had. Sgt Stokoe best describes the following moments. "The ME's kept close together in a steep spiral climb towards the sun. I pumped several bursts at the outside one from about 200 yards with little effect. I closed to about 50 yards and fired two more long bursts. Black smoke poured from his engine which appeared to catch fire, and 8 or 9 huge pieces of his fuselage were shot away. He spun steeply away and crashed inside the balloon barrage. I continued climbing after the other ME 109, and fired two long bursts from about 150 yards. White smoke came from his aircraft, and he spiralled gently downwards. I broke away as I was out of ammunition, and failed to see what happened to him."

The fatally stricken Messerschmitt high above London heading south towards Plumstead.
From a framed signed water colour entitled 'Battle Above The Clouds' by Geoff Nutall.

The Messerschmitt that Sgt Stokoe riddled with his fire, probably killed or badly wounded the unfortunate Lt Walter Binder , for as his stricken fighter spun down, he had no chance to bale out even if still alive. On the ground, witnesses had observed with alarm, a Spitfire in great trouble as it fell down from the dogfight and swept in towards Woolwich from the north-east and swooping in a great arc over the rooftops along Wellington Street to the south-side of the Artillery Barracks; the RAF fighter clipped trees and crashed into Repository Road. Had the pilot fought with the controls to steer his doomed aircraft away from housing? No-one can ever know, but Flying Officer Robin Waterston had paid the

ultimate price for his courage in battle. Having only just followed the path of the doomed Spitfire, the excitement of those on the ground increased as another aircraft was seen to be tumbling from the sky. It had lost a wing, was on fire and was coming straight down over Plumstead, the shorn wing fluttering serenely down to land in nearby Shrewsbury Park.

Flying Officer 'Bubble' Waterston.

To the great horror of residents in Anne Street and Robert Street, the flaming mass was going to land in their vicinity and they dived for what cover could be found. With an almighty crash it smashed down onto gardens between the two streets directly on top of an Anderson Shelter and exploded, throwing flaming debris in all directions with some people getting injured by the spray of burning fuel. Incredibly, the three occupants inside the shelter had not been killed, but were temporarily trapped and had to await rescue as exploding ammunition was another hazard. The sight over Plumstead got one young witness very excited as he recognised the aircraft to be a Me109, and he sprinted off from the vantage point at his home in Vernham Road towards the pyre of smoke across the other side of Plumstead Common. The late Museum co-Founder Frank Nutkins, then 16 years of age, was soon standing before the carnage of what remained of the Messerschmitt and the poor pilot. Almost straight away, enterprising locals had dragged an old tin bathtub out for people to throw monies into for viewing the crash in aid of the Woolwich Spitfire Fund. When they eventually came on the scene, there was little for the RAF crash investigators to identify the unit or pilot, but it was recorded that the spinner was yellow and that there was a shield showing a yellow snake with a red tongue and it was thought the Messerschmitt had crashed as a result of a mid-air collision. To identify the pilot, confirmation came partly from an identity disc and subsequent interrogation of an enemy prisoner shot down the same day. The POW was Binder's Kommander, Oberleutnant Helmut Rau, the Staffelkapitän of 3/JG3, who force landed at Shoeburyness after being hit by Pilot Officer Ronald 'Ras' Berry of 603 Squadron. Walter Binder's tragic remains were later removed and buried in Woolwich Cemetery. Reportedly at the funeral, a wreath was laid with a written tribute that said, "Some mother's son", which did not meet with much local approval. Today, Walter Binder rests in the Soldatenfriedhof German War Cemetery at Cannock Chase in Staffordshire. To further raise monies towards the Woolwich Spitfire Fund, pieces of the wreckage were sold off and young Frank purchased a prized wing - tip panel (that his mother subsequently threw out because it 'smelled'!) But thanks to Mr John Nichols who retrieved the engine cover as a souvenir, the Museum can display a poignant reminder of the Battle of Britain drama above Woolwich and Plumstead. The fund total of £5,000 needed to purchase a Spitfire was reached in November. Two days after Sgt Stokoe's victory, he was shot down

over Maidstone and though managing to bale out, he was badly burned about the face, neck and hands. After treatment he returned to operations in late October. He was commissioned in January 1941 and after completing another tour of fighter operations and taking up various posts, he was awarded a DFC in 1944. Jack Stokoe survived the war and was released from the RAF in 1946 with the rank of Squadron Leader. He joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve the following year and served until 1952. He sadly passed away in October 1999.

My father Frank Nutkins sadly passed away 18 months ago and was a teenager in Plumstead during that summer and had fantastic memories of the air battles; we later formed the museum together. Dad also found himself on bomber missions in the RAF towards the end of the war on Mitchell's in the 2nd TAF. His memories over a glass of Tizer when I was a young boy were an inspiration and we tried hard to collect whatever we could from the actual crash scenes; all of which is permanently on display here in the museum as a lasting memorial to the pilots of both the RAF and Luftwaffe. I picked up in dads footsteps and try to illustrate these aerial combats in my drawings and water colours, so am always looking to meet people who remember these crashes for the detail needed; i.e., colours, markings anything, and especially photographs. The SE18 crashes are of such interest to me because dad lived in Wrottesley Road in Plumstead and went to most of them, including Lieutenant Walter Binders, Friedemans, Robin Waterstone over at the Artillery Barracks, and Sgt Sarre's Spitfire Barnfield Gardens.

(12-1-10.)

FOOTNOTE:

Currently hanging on a wall in one corner of the Museum, above a display cabinet containing items related to the Hurst Green Dornier, is a crankcase cover and engine breather from a Daimler-Benz DB601A power plant that once powered a formidable Messerschmitt Me109E. The destruction of this Luftwaffe fighter over South-east London and the demise of its unfortunate occupant was just one incident from a day of great drama and tragedy.

Shoreham Aircraft Museum

High Street, Shoreham

Sevenoaks, Kent TN14 7TB

Telephone: 01959 524416

geoff@aviartnutkins.com

Websites:

www.shoreham-aircraft-museum.co.uk

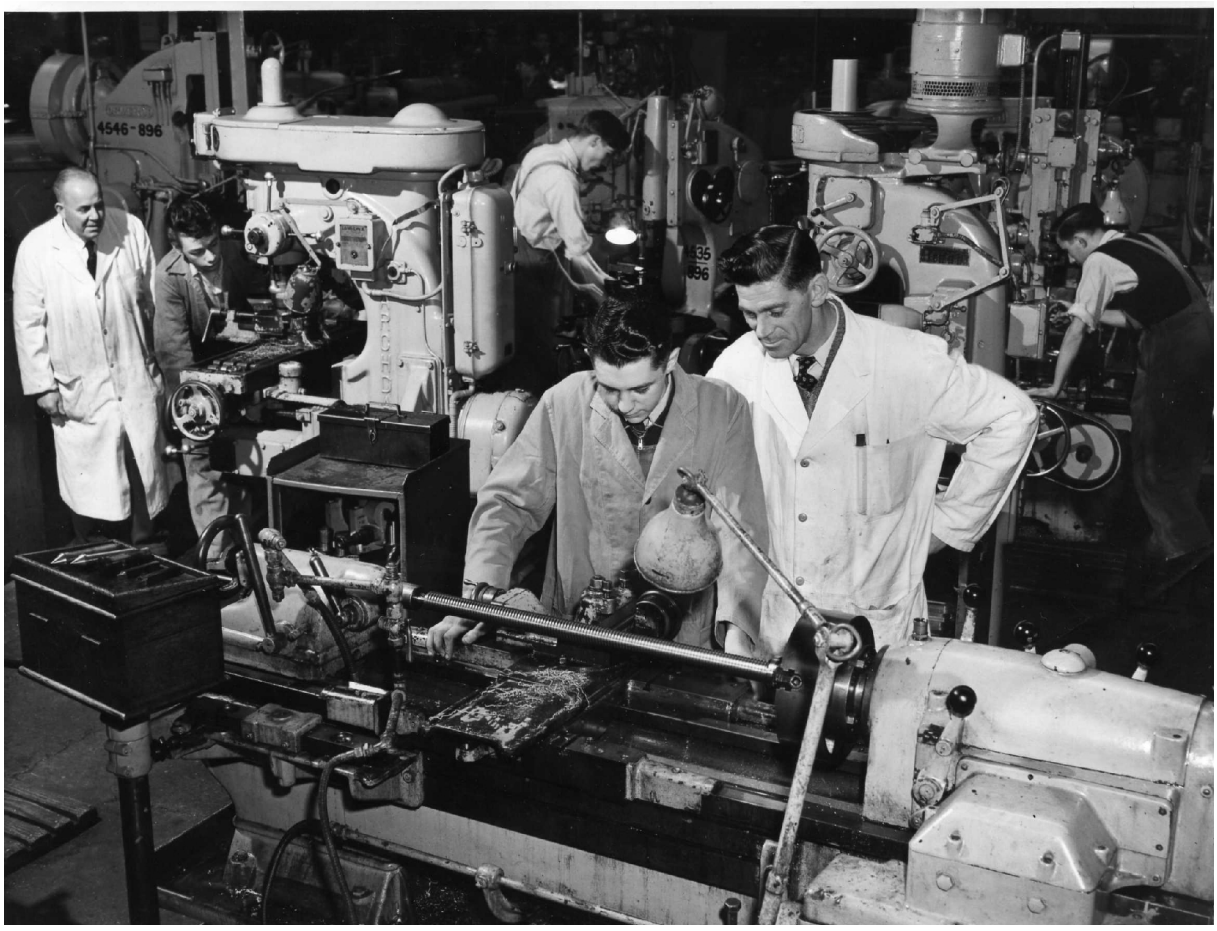
www.aviartnutkins.com

Early Days

Kay Welham.

I was born in Plumstead SE London on the 9th July 1945. I was the youngest child. My mother and father had previous marriages. I had a sister called Janet, born in 1943, and a half brother called Peter, born in 1940 in the Miller General Hospital, Greenwich. His mother was a nurse at the hospital and died six weeks later of pneumonia.

My father worked in the Woolwich Arsenal as an apprentice instructor and also served in the Home Guard. He had served in the First World war with his father and they were in the Lancashire Fusiliers. He was 16 years old at the time and said he was older. They served in Gallipoli where his father, my grandfather, was a blacksmith. When my nephew was researching this years later he was told it was very unusual for the two of them to come out alive; dad did have a bullet wound on his neck where a bullet had gone in one side and out the other.



Dad at The Woolwich Arsenal instructing a young trainee on the lathe.

Dad would take me to the pictures on the Common to the Globe and we would walk up Vicarage Road and past an unusual pub called the Bramblebury Arms, it had right of way through the pub to Hudson Road.

THE Bramblebury Arms demolished some years back, was a quaint delightful pub which once stood in Vicarage Road, Plumstead. It was unusual as it was the only pub I knew that had a right of way through it. You could enter it in Vicarage Road and walk through it to Hudson Road.

It had a small narrow public bar which was about the size of a front room. There was also a very small room adjoining the bar where, ;you could enjoy some live music on a Saturday night, or during the week watch a wonder of modern invention, the TELEVISION. In 1952, when my father took me along one night, not many homes possessed this electronic magic lantern.

The pub sold Beasley's Brilliant Beers produced by the local brewery which stood in Brewery Road. How many of you remember the magnificent horses which pulled the drays, and the stout ruddy-faced men who delivered the beer.

The horses knew the round, they needed no pull on the reins to stop at each pub on their route. I must confess they scared me, especially on a cold

by KEN SIMMONS

day, when they stamped their hooves and appeared to discharge smoke from their nostrils.

The sight of them, made me cross to the other side of the road. I am glad to say when the brewery merged with Courage's in 1965, it was agreed to keep the horses for the rest of their working lives and then put them out to pasture when they retired.

"What you gonna' have son?" my father asked me, on my first visit to the Bramblebury. "A pint of mild or an O.B.J." The O.B.J. was a potent drink, the initials stood for: Oh Be Joyful. Mine hosts were Bert and Ciss Barber. Bert a modest and likeable man was an ex-Royal Artillery Bandsman.

His wife Ciss, a petite lively woman, loved animals, any stray cat that wandered into the pub gardens never went short of a meal. Bert had been a viola player, and joined in with musicians on their Saturday night session. Edie a tall thin woman with pointed features, who favoured wearing a Chinese coolie type hat even when she was playing the piano, would wave aside any wrong notes she played, with a gesture of her hand. My father often sat in with his banjo.

It was a popular haunt for musicians. Bert's pride and passion was his rose garden in the pub yard. Opposite the Bramblebury Arms stood the Old Vicarage, which today is a private house. The vicarage was built in 1790.

It was called 'Bramblebriars'which was later corrupted to 'Bramblebury'. It became Plumstead Vicarage in 1865 when St. Margarets Church, built 1858 demolished 1966, was made the parish church. The old parsonage in Plumstead High Street, now the Volunteer public house, was disposed of in part exchange for 'Bramblebury'.

It was at The Bramblebury Arms I sang in public for the first time, and on and off I have been involved in the entertainment business ever since.

I could have sworn I saw Ciss in Woolwich New Road a few months ago, exactly looking the same as I remember her from all those years ago.

Unfortunately she vanished into the crowd before I could say hallo.

If you're out there Ciss, let us know. I hope this Look Back recalls happy days for some of the old regulars.

The article about the Bramblebury Arms in a local paper.

When I was older my sister and brother and I would go to the bug hutch called the Century in Plumstead. We would pass by the fish and chip shop that had a model of a monkey in the window and it had a white cape and a white hat on.

Cannon's paper shop (1966).
Photo: Lesley Turner.

My address was 44 Glyndon Road, Plumstead and I lived next door to Cannon's the newspaper shop. Mr and Mrs Cannon had two sons, one was married and Roger Cannon, who was about the same age as me. There was a shop on every corner and Bon Tons the laundry was directly opposite our house. On the other corner

there was a shop called Usherwood's, where we would buy broken biscuits. On the other side of that was a green grocers called Wisdom's. We did not have a television at the time and I would go to Lesley Wakeman's house to watch Quatermass, that was a big thing on the tele at the time.

Coronation Party in the Robert Street Church hall, Plumstead, 1953.

When I was old enough to go to school I went to Earl Rise and started in the infants. I remember crying as some of the kids had mauve iodine on their faces and I did not want the nurse to put some of it on me. One day I ran out of school and went home. My brother took me in the next day and I had to stand facing the blackboard with my back to the class; I was about five years old at the time and thought that I did not have to stay there at school all day. I was also in Mr Mitchell's class. He was a lovely teacher, very jovial and kind. There was also a teacher called Mr Vaughan who was very spiteful; if he caught you talking at dinner time he would come up and hit you on the head with a half crown; very painful when you were seven or eight years old, now he would get done for GBH! My last year was spent in Miss Holmes class, she was a lovely teacher and quite young, she took us youth hostelling to Kemsing.

There was a character called Bill Painter; he used to live in Earl Rise and was well known around the Plumstead and Woolwich areas and around the world when he made the news in 1949 for climbing Eros, in Piccadilly Circus, London, after a bet and a few drinks. I have attached a copy of this from one of the local papers, but you can get further information by going into Pathe News, 1949, and putting in Bill Painter and Eros and the film clip comes up.

We all used to sit on the walls outside our house until Bill Painter walked up the street swaggering and calling out abuse to any one who looked at him. Someone used to say,

"Here comes Bill Painter and we all used to scarper in doors.

From Earl Rise School I moved on to Church Manorway School, where my surname was changed to Connors from Goodman, my mothers surname, as she had remarried. My friend Lesley Wakeman had gone to Waverley Road School, but we stayed good friends and we ended up working together at Foyle's.

My brother Peter Connors Trafalgar Square 1942.

My brother Peter was already at Bloomfield School by this time; he had a Saturday job at the Co-op, at the Links on Plumstead Common, delivering fruit and vegetables. I think he got paid about 12/6. Peter belonged to the Scout group in Brewery Road.

I got married in March 1965 at St Margaret's Church, Plumstead. The Rev John Southgate was the vicar there at the time. About a year later the church was condemned when they found dry rot in the rafters and sadly it was eventually pulled down.

We had a flat at this time in Ancona Road that was also on the corner of Leghorn Road. A year later in 1966 we bought a house in Highmead, just off Swingate Lane, on the 51 bus route. This was handy for work and it depended on what side of the road the bus come along first as to whether I would go via Woolwich Arsenal or Welling station.

I moved to Orpington in 1972 where I am still in the same house. I went back to Highmead recently and although the houses are still the same the parade of shops that were at the end of Swingate Lane are derelict and boarded up. (2010)

Glyndon Road early 1960's.

In the summer holidays every day was spent on the common; there was about seven or eight of us kids. We would take a picnic and spend all day picking blackberries in the ravine and climbing over the fence to where the small lake was. We also used to run down one lot of steps and up the other ones. My brother Peter was five years older and he was always asked to take care of us, he got fed up with it in the end. We also used to go to the paddling pool on Winn's Common and I think there may have been a sandpit there. We also played on Winn's Common where we made hide outs

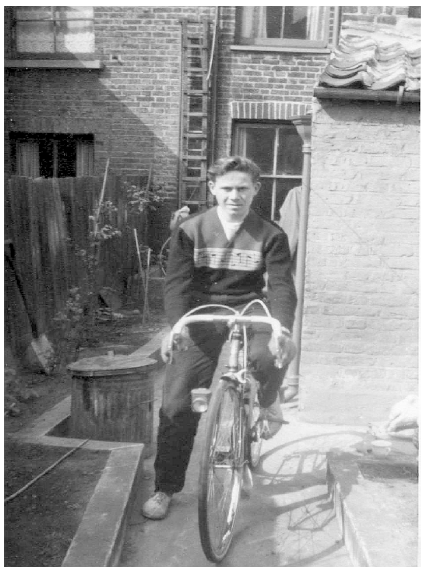
over where it was overgrown and where it backed onto St Nicks Hospital.

My boyfriend Ken Welham (who I married in 1965) in Glyndon Road early 1960's.

We also took a little girl called Margaret out with us. She was only about four or five years old and we looked after her. Her parents ran the Park Estate Tavern at the time. She was a lovely little girl and was out one weekend with some relatives and fell off a swing and banged her head and very sadly, she died, it was very tragic; her parents gave up the pub and moved away.

There was also a children's play area by the Slade School where we would also spend a lot of time. My brother Peter went to Conway Road School and we would some times go to the play centre there after school and play games like table tennis and shuttlecock.

We all had roller skates in those days, mine were metal rollers and made quite a noise when we skated around the block and some of the neighbours complained about the noise on a Sunday. My bother Peter used to skate down Griffin Road and once was going so fast all the ball bearings flew out of the skate wheels!. My Uncle who lived with us made us stilts out of blocks of wood and we would walk around on these. There was hardly any cars about in the 50s and we would have a skipping rope from one side of the road to the other and sing all together as girls, and we also played hopscotch.



My brother Peter, back garden, Glyndon Road.

There was only one vehicle in the road in the 50s and that was a van belonging to Rene and Geoff Davies. They used to sell tomatoes in Beresford Square. Rene was the daughter of Mrs Ford who was married to Johnny Ford. They sold bananas on Beresford Square and they were known as the banana king and queen of Woolwich.

Rene and Geoff had a mongrel dog called Buller. He was a lovely friendly dog until it come to motor bikes! He also liked the large arrowroot biscuits bought from the Park Estate Tavern as well as any motor bikes. Buller barked before the motor bikes came along the road and then he would chase them all the way down Glyndon Road barking his head off to Robert Street and even further if he could catch up with them; he got quite a few kicks

but this would not deter him.

Myself, Danny Dalton and Lesley Wakeman wanted to go to the Harvest festival in the Baptist church at the corner of Glyndon Road and Robert Street, but we did not have food to take; we found a sack of potatoes outside Freddie Day's greengrocers in Anne Street and so took them along, Freddie Day also delivered coal.

Royal Arsenal Beano 1950's.

Royal Arsenal Exhibition 1950's.

I also remember when the milkman was driving his float down Elmley Street and the brakes must have gone. He ended up going over the embankment where the railway was, luckily for him it stopped halfway.

Mum, Maureen Connors 1953.

My Grandmother and my mum, in about 1909.

As regards to my mother's side of the family; my mother was born in Plumstead on the 11 March 1906 and lived at 55 Villas Road, Plumstead. On her birth certificate it read Ada Matilda but she was known as Maureen.

Her father was from Dublin and his name was Thomas Flanagan; he was a labourer in the Torpedo factory at the Woolwich Arsenal, my mother also worked there when she was in her teens. Her father Thomas died when she was four years old.

My mother had two sisters, Jeannie born in 1900 and Mary. I don't have any details about Mary and a older brother Tom.

Mum's sister Jeannie married Joe Miller. Joe's parents were from Lithuania and had changed their name from Mueller to Miller when arriving in England.

Back garden of Villas Road. 1st row sitting down my mother, her mother Jane, and elder sister Jeannie, around 1916 or 1917.

Joe and Jeannie had a barbers

shop in Plumstead High Street; I think it was next door to the Conservative Club. Jeannie fell through the floor of the barber shop and got phlebitis in her leg, she died in 1932, aged 32. Joe died six weeks later, he was also 32 years old and died from a broken heart. They are buried in the cemetery in Wickham Lane.

Jeannie and Joe had a son called Lionel, he must have been about seven or eight years old when his parents died. My grandmother brought him up, they lived in Elmley Street in Plumstead. Lionel become a schoolmaster at Crown Woods School, Eltham.

My grandmother with grandchildren Lionel, Gloria and Denis.

My grandmother died in 1951 aged 79 years old and is also buried in the Wickham Road cemetery. Also, in the next door grave are Joe's parents and an adopted son called Stanley, who died of consumption aged 21 years.

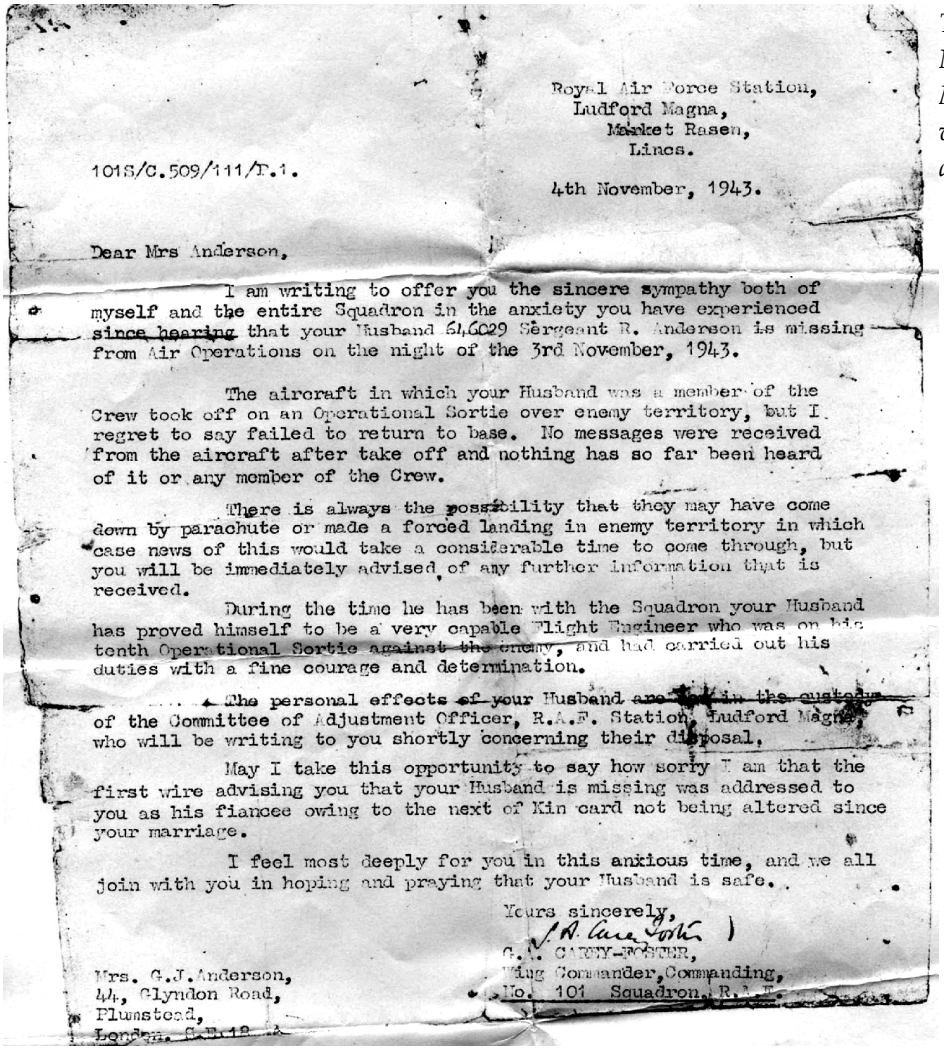
My sister Gloria Joyce Goodman was born in 1926 and joined the Women's Land Army in 1941 with a friend of hers also from Plumstead. Gloria was 15 years old and she went to work on a farm in Cheshunt in Hertfordshire. She was billeted with a Mr and Mrs Keys in Hatton Road in Cheshunt. They had a son Leslie Keys who was in the army. Gloria said that at that time, they were the only two girls from the Plumstead area to join. She received a medal from George Brown in 2008. Gloria died Easter in 2009.

My sister Gloria, a Land Army girl WWII.

During one of her weekends on home leave, Gloria met Robert Anderson, known as Bob, who was in the RAF. Bob lived in Robert Street in Plumstead with his foster parents. Gloria and Bob was married on the 18th September 1943. Six weeks later the aircraft that Bob was in, a Lancaster Bomber, was shot down over Germany, he was the only member of the six man crew to survive and was taken prisoner. He was in a POW camp in Poland and in 1945 his camp was liberated by the Russians. I have added the letter that Gloria received from the MOD stating missing presumed dead. also a cutting from the paper at the time, stating another POW returns, Sergeant Robert Anderson returns to his home in Glyndon Road, Plumstead.

My sister Gloria and Robert (Bob) wedding on 18th September 1943.

In the early 1960's Bob was left some money by his mother he never knew. Mrs Cannon, who ran the newspaper shop, said that a few years previous a woman had come to the shop enquiring about him and Mrs Cannon was able to tell her that Bob lived in Glyndon Road and had a son called Tony Anderson, Tony went to Conway Road School, they also had a daughter Jeanette. Bob never met his mother. Bob survived the war only to be knocked down and died when he walked out behind a bus in Wellhall Road in early 1980.



Royal Air Force Station,
Ludford Magna,
Market Rasen,
Lincs.

101S/C.509/111/P.1.

4th November, 1943.

Dear Mrs Anderson,

I am writing to offer you the sincere sympathy both of myself and the entire Squadron in the anxiety you have experienced since hearing that your Husband 646029 Sergeant R. Anderson is missing from Air Operations on the night of the 3rd November, 1943.

The aircraft in which your Husband was a member of the Crew took off on an Operational Sortie over enemy territory, but I regret to say failed to return to base. No messages were received from the aircraft after take off and nothing has so far been heard of it or any member of the Crew.

There is always the possibility that they may have come down by parachute or made a forced landing in enemy territory in which case news of this would take a considerable time to come through, but you will be immediately advised of any further information that is received.

During the time he has been with the Squadron your Husband has proved himself to be a very capable Flight Engineer who was on his tenth Operational Sortie against the enemy, and had carried out his duties with a fine courage and determination.

The personal effects of your Husband are [illegible] in the custody of the Committee of Adjustment Officer, R.A.F. Station, Ludford Magna, who will be writing to you shortly concerning their disposal.

May I take this opportunity to say how sorry I am that the first wire advising you that your Husband is missing was addressed to you as his fiancee owing to the next of Kin card not being altered since your marriage.

I feel most deeply for you in this anxious time, and we all join with you in hoping and praying that your Husband is safe.

Yours sincerely,

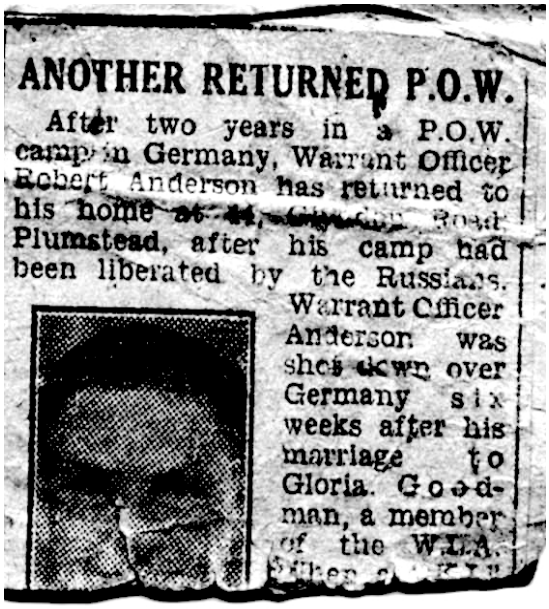
G.A. CAREY-FOSTER,
Wing Commander, Commanding,
No. 101 Squadron, R.A.F.

Mrs. G.J. Anderson,
44, Glyndon Road,
Plumstead,
London, S.E.18

The letter, dated 14th Nov 1943, from the MOD stating Robert was missing presumed dead.

My sister Gloria with my brother Peter about 1942/3.

Newspaper cutting from 1945 about Robert's return to Plumstead from a POW camp.



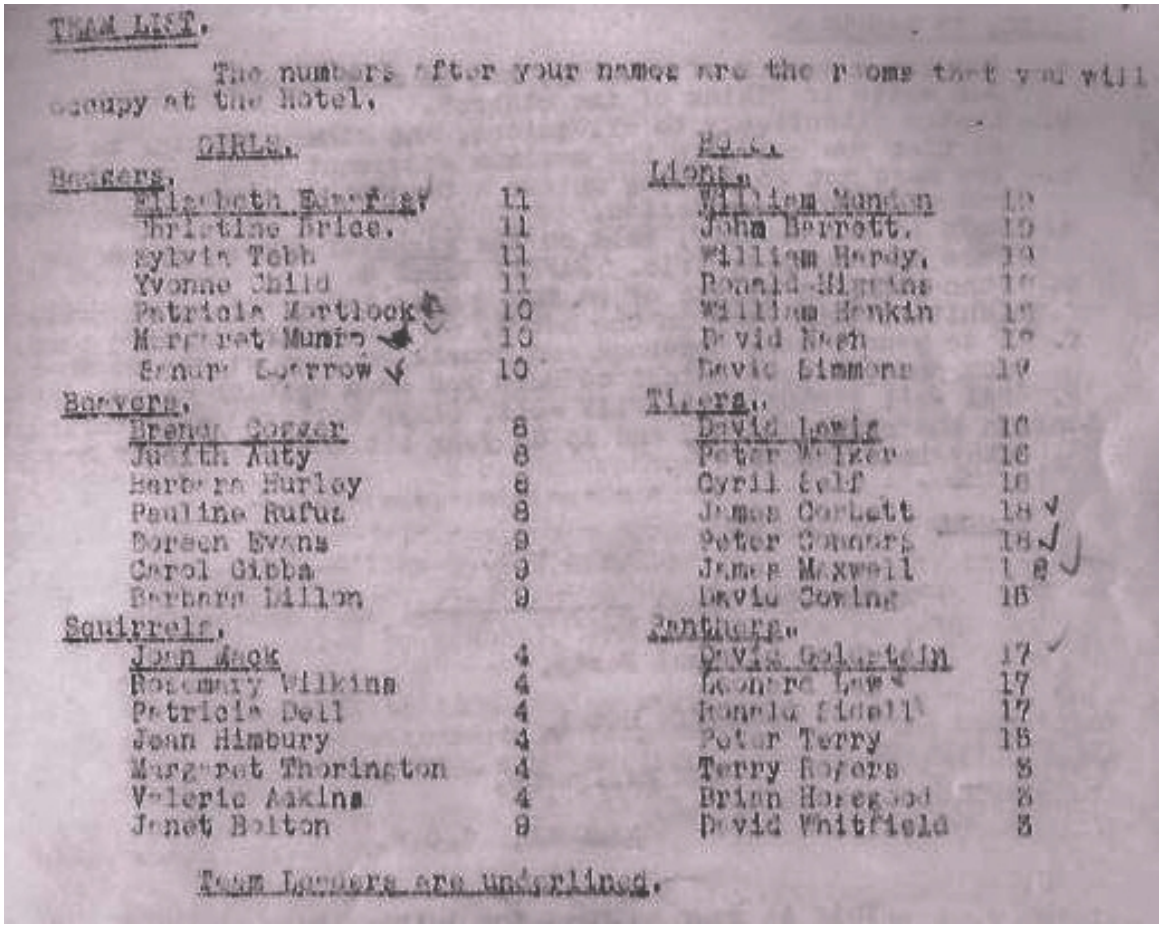
ANOTHER RETURNED P.O.W.

After two years in a P.O.W. camp in Germany, Warrant Officer Robert Anderson has returned to his home at 44, [illegible] Road, Plumstead, after his camp had been liberated by the Russians.

Warrant Officer Anderson was shot down over Germany six weeks after his marriage to Gloria. Goodman, a member of the W.L.A. [illegible]

My brother Peters wedding to Miriam lee, Lewisham 1968. I am a bridesmaid left and sister Janet on right.

My brother Peter went on the Conway Road School trip to the Isle of Wight and has a list of the children that went on the trip. Photo below.



TEAM LIST.

The numbers after your names are the rooms that you will occupy at the Hotel.

GIRLS.

Badgers.

Elizabeth Edwards	11
Christine Brice.	11
Sylvia Tebb	11
Yvonne Child	11
Patricia Mortlock	10
Margaret Munro	10
Sandra Scarrow	10

Beavers.

Brenda Cozzer	8
Judith Auty	8
Barbara Hurley	8
Pauline Rufus	8
Doreen Evans	9
Carol Gibbs	9
Barbara Dillon	9

Squirrels.

Joan Mack	4
Rosemary Wilkins	4
Patricia Dell	4
Jean Himbury	4
Margaret Thorington	4
Valerie Adkins	4
Janet Bolton	9

BOYS.

Lions.

William Munden	19
John Barrett.	19
William Hardy.	19
Ronald Higgins	19
William Hankin	19
David Nash	19
David Simmons	19

Tigers.

David Lewis	16
Peter Walker	16
Cyril Self	16
James Corbett	18
Peter Connors	18
James Maxwell	18
David Cowing	16

Panthers.

David Goldstein	17
Leonard Law	17
Ronald Sidell	17
Peter Terry	15
Terry Rogers	3
Brian Hosegood	3
David Whitfield	3

Team Leaders are underlined.

Bloomfield Road School. Peter is in front row, 2nd from left.

Peter also went on a school journey with Conway Primary School to Sandown, from the 14th to the 28th May in 1952. His wife Miriam still has the diary he kept of this trip. Peter then went on to Bloomfield Road School.

Peter as 'ole mother Riley' at the Earl Rise Social Club Christmas party, the club was formed after the Coronation 1953.

Peter, Brewery Road Scout trip, I think the surname of boy on left was Goldstein and his parents had a wallpaper and decorating shop in Plumstead High Street, just before Lakedale Road.

Kay at Earl Rise Primary School.

My wedding day, St Margaret's Church in 1965.

Early Plumstead Street Celebrations

Bastion Road Coronation party 1937. The houses at the bottom of the road (Plumstead High Street) were all bombed in the war and were replaced by flats and Purton's Garage. Photo: Kathleen Smith.

Earl Rise Coronation Street party 1953. *Photo: Lesley Turner.*

At the junction of Bramblebury Road and Durham Rise, this photo was taken at a street party celebrating the end of the 1st World War. The ladies name at the forefront of the picture is Florence Bingham and the lady next to her is Lillian Crawford.

Margaret Forbes (nee Spooner), who kindly sent in these photos, says, “I got this info from Flo's daughter, who is 82 years old now, (2009) and I consider the information is reliable.

I went to the Greenwich Heritage Centre in regards to the photos in this story..

With regard to the event and date the lady I spoke to, who had a great deal of local knowledge, said she would put the event as a celebration marking the end of the 1st World War and therefore the date would be circa 1918”.

The photos over the next page, with the pram in the foreground, was at Hartville Road and Garibaldi Street; the shop on the right, at the rear of the photo was called Alfred Savage Grocer. These facts are also correct according to the record books.

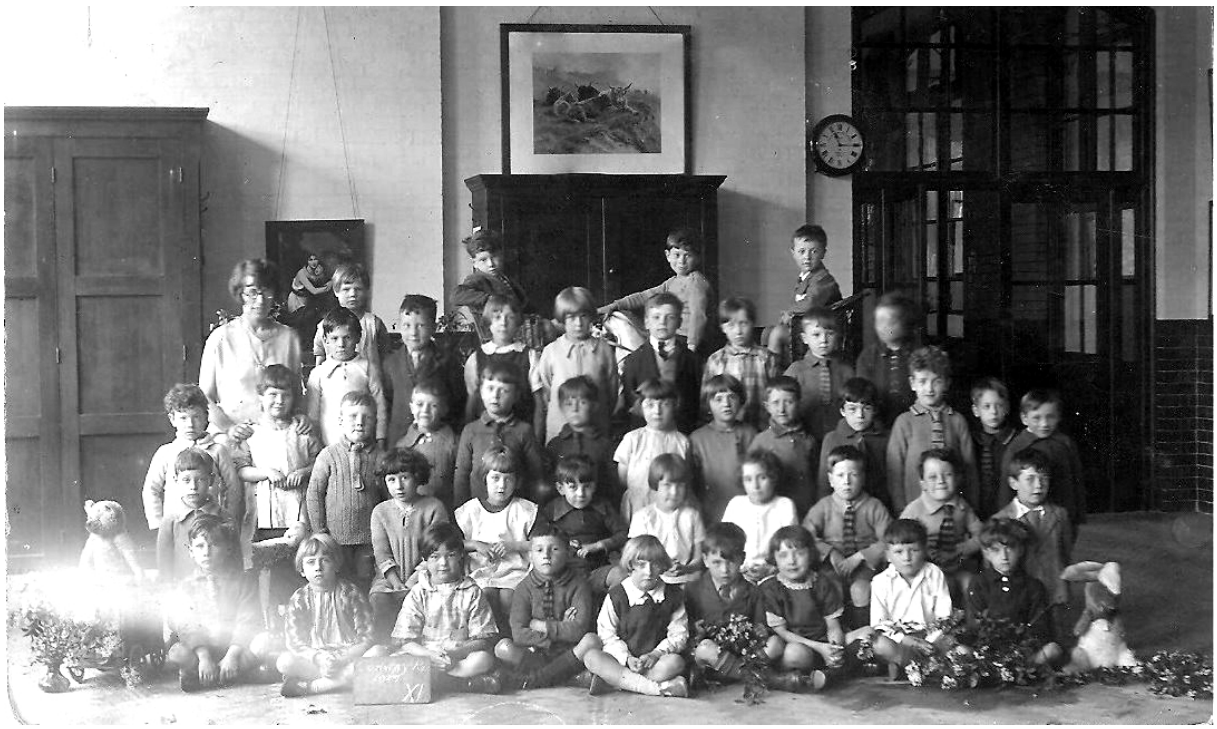
The other photograph, with all the children seated in front of the corner shop which was situated on the corner junction of Gunning and Garibaldi Streets and the shop was called Alfred Edward Paine Bakery. With the assistance of a member of staff, we found the information in one of the record books, so I am satisfied they are correct.

Junction of Gunning and Garibaldi Street. Shop on corner was called Alfred Edward Paine Bakery.

Parry Place VE Street party (off Plumstead High Street). *Photo: Kenneth Rowden.*

Incidentally, Margaret said that she obtained these early Conway Road School photos below.

Conway Road School, group X, 1934. The girl 3rd from girl sitting by bird on left, seated,, with a cross on front of dress, is Peggy Harris from Gunning Street.

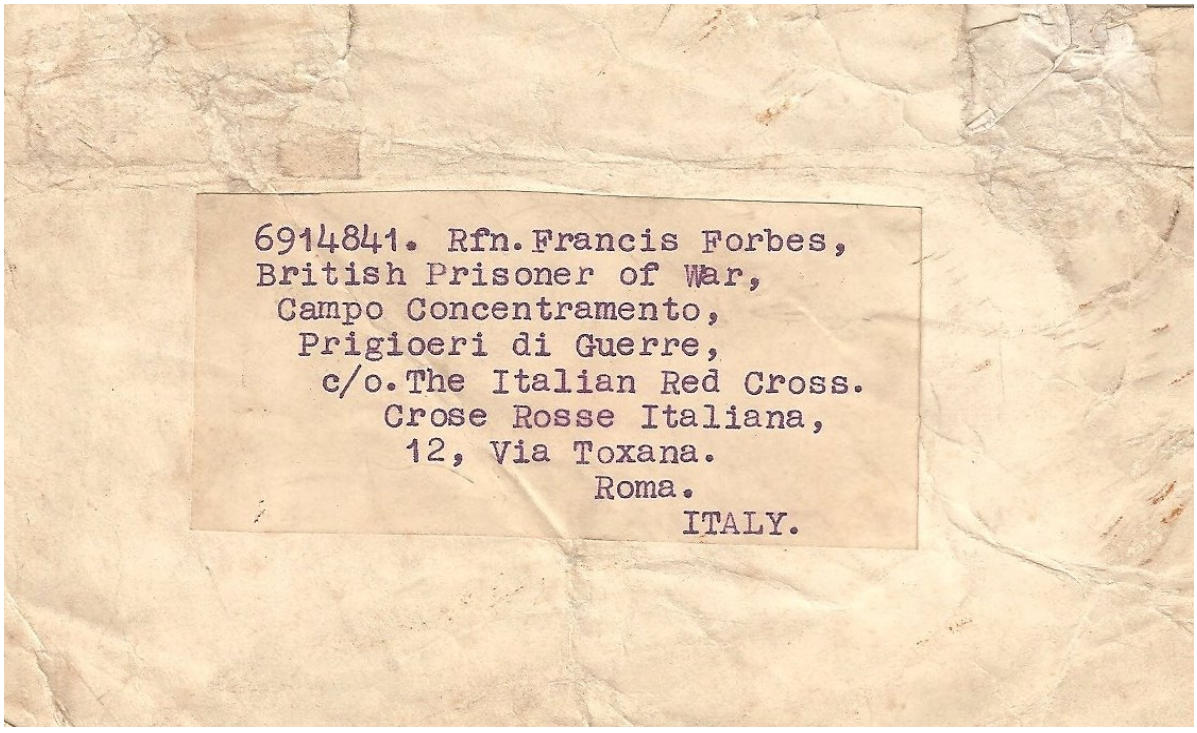


Conway Road School, group XI 1934. *Photos: Margaret Forbes.*

The addressed envelope is my husband's father's, who was a POW in Italy for some years, until he escaped over the mountains. He got frostbite in his feet and lost some of his toes.

The story of the great escape was in the local ' Kentish Independent' newspaper.

My husband lived in Bannockburn Road



As a child I lived at 153 Parkdale Road. It was a big family and my cousins Gaynor Morey, and Raymond were great friends of Brian Rakey, who is mentioned in the first volumes of '*Common Fol*k. Gaynor has told me stories about that "wicked stepmother" of Brian's.

Later, I moved to Barnfield Gardens. Some of the people who I remember who lived there were : At Kelham House: Jackie Lavery, Michael Wilkes, Billy Thorn, Peter Dono, The Gooches, and Julie Hoare. At Kimber House was Bertie Brace, Graham Lockston, Richard Parker.

Eglington Road 1st November 1944

Extract from the story told by Lorna Chudasama (now Wilkinson) in Common Folk, Volume 1

In 1944, the occupants of 144 Eglinton Road were Margaret Anderson Wilson, her son-in-law Vic Hinds, her three youngest daughters, Winnie Hind (nee Wilson), Leonora Riches (nee Wilson) and Nancy Wilson. Also in the house, were her infant grandchildren, Lorna Riches aged three and Jack Riches Jnr aged 3 months. The undermentioned extract is a child's memory. The destruction in the early hours of 1st November was caused by a V2 rocket (not a doodle bug) that fell that night in Eglinton Road.

"Our home at 144 Eglington Road was destroyed by a doodle bug late one night in October 1944. I awoke to a loud rumbling and crashing sound. I was coughing and struggling to get my breath. There was thick dust and debris. My brother was only a few weeks old; something had fallen across his cot but fortunately not on him. I was barely three and remember being carried outside by a fireman. I kept asking what has happened to my nana's house. The gas main was alight and there was a lot of activity. The fireman holding me was handed a tin mug of tea from which I took several sips before being placed in an ambulance with my mother and brother. The ambulance was driven by a woman who took us to a hospital. My ears were syringed and my brothers eyes were bathed. His eyelids were swollen. We were relatively unscathed and discharged a few hours later. We were taken to a Rest Centre where we spent a couple of nights. The Rest Centre was at Slade School. Here, the Salvation Army gave us soup and distributed items from parcels sent from America. We were given scented soap and talcum powder as well as clothing and bedding. The clothing was new and my baby brother had a beautiful blue knitted suit. My grandmother joined us at the Rest Centre and was given several beautiful sewn quilts which had tickets on them indicating they were gifts from the Ladies Guild of Ohio. My grandmother had not been at home when it was hit, she had gone, as usual, to the shelter where she slept each night. I had been repeatedly asking what happened to my nana's house, but no one told me until at last my grandmother said it had been knocked down by the apples and pears. Strangely enough, that explanation satisfied me for a few years."

Extract From Mike Hume's email to Lorna Wilkinson dated 20th August 2009.

My wife Chris and I were just amazed to read about your family history on Colin's *web site, and discover that you and your family lived just two doors away from my family who lived at 140 Eglinton Road during the war years. *plumstead-stories.com

It was so interesting to read about your life history, and that of your family.

Sadly, my mum and grandmother, brother and aunt were all killed when the rocket struck at about 2 am on 1st Nov. 1944. My older sister Mary & brother Geoffrey and I had been evacuated to Devon a few months previously, I was five years old at the time.

After the war, we returned to Plumstead to live with an elderly aunt and uncle at 67 Vernon Road, and after attending Plum Lane School, I then attended Conway Rd. School where having passed the 11+, I then went to St Olave's & St. Saviour's Grammar School in London.

Sadly the trauma of the loss of my family blanked out most of my childhood memories, and my aunt never talked about our family or any of the circumstances of that fateful day on 1st of Nov 1944.

Following the death of my aunt in 1951, I was put into the care of the LCC and lived with a number of families. After leaving school I joined the Merchant Navy and then the Army. (REME)

We would love to hear from you and your mother, and wonder whether she may remember my family at all. The picture you posted on Colin's Web site, sitting on the front steps of No 144 Eglinton Rd. brought the memories flooding back as I do remember similar entrance steps at No 140.

Interestingly we have a copy of the Polling District Returns for the Herbert Road Ward, area of Plumstead dated 1938/39, which shows the people eligible to vote at No. 144 as :

Thomas Wilson.

Margaret Anderson Wilson.

Dennis Ingram White.

Lawrence Alan White.

My family were not living there at that time as I believe they were living at 83 Barnfield Road, having previously been bombed out of their home at No 4 Brookhill Row. We believe they may have possibly moved into No 140 Eglinton Road in 1941/2.

Extract from a letter Nancy Martindale nee Wilson wrote to Lorna Wilkinson 26 August 2009 regarding the rocket attack 1 November 1944.

The only people I remember from Eglinton Road were the elderly couple next door who had Winnie and I rocking with laughter as they walked from the basement of their bombed house wearing long white nightgowns complete with a tasselled hat – something out of a Dickens character! We were told off by the Home Guard for laughing.

I personally will never forget that rocket. I woke up to a bright light (I still slept in the back bedroom) and then I was hit by bricks falling all over me which stopped after a while. I tried to get out of bed but something was stopping me. I eventually crawled out to discover it was the bath from upstairs suspended on wires across my bed. I then discovered all the walls to my room had disappeared, together with my wardrobe and the sink. I called out to Nora (Leonora) down the stairs who said you were all okay. Obviously I was in the garden and heard mother and Winnie calling my name (they had come from the shelter) but because of the thick smoke had lost their way. We eventually caught up with each other and as you know were taken to Slade School where we were allocated bunks.

The next morning we were interviewed and given coupons for a few clothes as we were still in our night clothes (or rather I was!). How much mother was compensated I do not know – after all she lost an awful lot.

After that we were offered accommodation in North London where there was no bombing, but neither mum or Win would accept this and wanted to stick to what they knew, so we went to 74 Shrewsbury Lane. Win didn't, and I never saw Win again until after the war.

Mum and I went to 74 and the first night we were there a bomb fell across the road and took all our windows out. That finished mother and she never slept at 74 again until the war ended. (Mum went to the Town Hall catacombs to sleep) I slept in the cupboard under the stairs for the remainder of the War.

Unfortunately I had to have lumps removed from my breast as a result of the bricks hitting me. When I came out of hospital I went to the catacombs under the Town Hall with mother but only stayed two nights. The smell was overpowering – hundreds of human bodies crammed in a small space. The office was very good to me and gave me indefinite leave.

Incidentally, the stay in the hospital was a nightmare. The warnings kept going and the walking wounded had to make their way to the basement. How the Surgeons coped with all that happening I do not know and what the Nurses did with the seriously ill I do not know but they all deserved medals. Counselling was unheard of then - we all coped.

I hope I haven't bored you, but my intake of the war is different to anybody else because I was the only one in the family on my own until the end of the War. Also, no one else was buried by bricks like I was. Alan* did go back with me to Eglinton Road as I had left some dance shoes under the bed. When I saw in the daylight what was left of the house, especially my room, I realized how lucky I was to be alive. Soon after that Lyn came back from the War in Burma and thereby hangs another tale!

**A half brother, Alan White, in a reserved occupation, he lived close by.*

Following receipt of Nancy's letter a discussion took place on 30 October 2009 between Leonora Riches nee Wilson and Lorna Wilkinson nee Riches regarding the night the rockets fell resulting in a tragic loss of life and widespread destruction. Leonora (known to her family as Nora) related her story as follows:-

As usual mum and Winnie left for the air raid shelter. Vic was home on leave but that night (31 October–1 November 1944) was attending an engagement party a few doors across the road. The engagement was between Sam Pearce and Enid. Sam Pearce was a long time friend of Vic's. They had been school-hood friends. I settled Lorna and baby Jack down to sleep and went to bed myself – fully clothed as was usual during those very disturbing times. A few hours later I awoke hearing a loud crashing noise, bricks and plaster falling around me. The room appeared to be lit up by flames, the air was thick with smoke. The baby was crying but appeared unhurt and Lorna answered me when I called her. I called out to Nancy who slept upstairs. Nancy answered, saying she was alright and asked if we were okay. We were helped outside and waited to be taken to hospital.

We were checked over at the hospital and then taken to Slade School where we were given soup and bedding. Winnie and mum joined us. Winnie said the neighbouring houses and some of those across the road had been destroyed, including the one where the engagement party was being held. Vic was unhurt and had come looking for Win. His friend, Sam Pearce had been killed. In the house next door to the party, a man and his baby had been killed. The mother had survived. We must have been at the Slade School for a week. Jack, who was in France, was to be given compassionate leave but it was some time before he was located and returned to Woolwich. Jack said he was horrified at the devastation and couldn't believe anyone could have escaped alive. He leaned on a wall and smoked a cigarette to steady his

nerves when a man approached and told him all the survivors had been taken to the Slade School. We later learned that our neighbours, an older couple with two sons by the name of Stutts had survived, but an entire family a few doors away (at 140) had perished.

Accompanied by Jack we travelled to his parents home in Gosport and stayed with them a few weeks until married quarters was made available to us. My sister Margaret Powley had been widowed. Stan had been killed in France. Margaret and Judith stayed with us for a few weeks before leaving to join mum and Nancy in Plumstead.

This photo was taken in Woolwich in October 1944 of my mother and my baby brother and me aged three years old. This was literally just days before the V2 rocket fell.

VE Street party Hartington Road Gosport. With me, aged three, my mother, paternal grandmother and grandfather, each with a cross above their heads.

See also: Mike Hume Family. Story.

Entertaining Tales On The Common

Diane Smith

Looking back over the years, I realise that we did not lack for entertainment if we lived on or near Plumstead Common. We were very lucky children, especially as some of those pleasures were free or very affordable. I lived right near the Bandstand, oh that lovely Edwardian bandstand, sadly now longer standing. Throughout the summer every Wednesday evening there was some entertainment staged there. Sometimes it would be a Concert Party with singing and dancing, or a comedian and perhaps a conjurer. Oh what fun times they were. A fence was set up across the path on both sides and chairs unfolded in the enclosed space, and up the terraces you could simply sit on the benches or swing your feet on the edge of the terrace and all this for 3d. But who needed to pay to get in when you could stand outside and hear it all anyway? Sometimes it was a band playing, and every Sunday there was a band concert. Again, we did not need to pay, because if we left our doors and windows open we could hear it all for free.

During the summer months the council, or somebody, sent around a big van which showed movies on a screen at the back of the van whilst we all sat quietly on the grass and drank it all in. That was absolutely free. Does anyone remember that?

We had tennis courts by St John's Terrace and a putting green alongside the bowling green, which was always full of elderly gents in their whites during the summer. There used to be a tea hut, with little collapsible tables outside, which would collapse at the wrong moment, covering you in tea or orange squash. We would have this as a treat with a fairy cake; the drink that is, not the collapsing bit! (Though I suppose it could be looked on as a bonus laugh!) My children carried on the tradition when they used to play tennis or putting when they were growing up. We had drinking fountains all over the place and, let's face it, when you are young and racing about all over the common you need a drink from time to time. Why no drinking fountains now? The dreaded 'Elf-n-Safety brigade I suppose.

The trees we climbed, albeit illegally, were wonderful vehicles for our imagination and many were the games of Robin Hood or Cowboys and Indians with covered wagons played there. You had to watch out for the Park Keepers though, in their brown uniforms with trilby hat, carrying their pointed sticks with which they picked up the rubbish. Or they chased us waving them threateningly if they caught us up the trees. Although we were afraid of being caught by them, we also felt safe to know they were patrolling the common. We were more afraid though to tell our parents we had been caught than of being caught. The Park Keepers have more than once however, chased away bullies and kids from outside the area causing grief. They were firm but fair with us. Oh, where are they now?

Once a year the Fair came to town, but we were never allowed to go there without our parents, and even a circus came to the common. On Sundays cricket was played on the top common, outside the Albert pub, and my dad would walk us up there to watch, (a bit boring to me) but afterwards, he would take us into the pub gardens and buy us a lemonade and a packet of crisps. Yum!

On Saturdays, my mum and I would walk up to St Margaret's Church to watch the

weddings. Most of the ladies did that, and occasionally the bridegroom would come out after the photos and throw a handful of change for us kids onto the pavement. Anyone would think we had never seen any pennies before. The piece de resistance however, was the Saturday films at the Globe picture house on Plumstead Common Road, just at the top of the Hollow and opposite Plum Lane. I believe it was originally a chapel before it became the cinema. We loved going there with our friends and peeling oranges and throwing the peel at each other. To this day, if I smell a peeled orange I am back in the darkness of the Globe. At one time it was closed down and refurbished to be revealed in all it's glory as... tah dah!... The Savoy. Many dreams were born there before that silver screen. Sadly, it is now gone and a block of flats stand on the site.

Many were the games of rounders that we played on the Common. The patch of grass outside my house was just the right size and had the right number of trees in the right places to use as bases. The boys were always playing football in the middle of the Common behind the Bandstand so that it was permanently bald of grass just there. Coats were used as goalposts and us girls were dragooned into being the adoring audience. I remember one girl who was a friend of mine, called Margaret, who had a slight cast in one eye who used to hang around with us. One day, she ran after the football to catch it and as she stooped to pick it up, one of the boys aimed a kick at it but connected with her head instead. Purely an accident, but he was mortified. Do you know, and this is the truth...she never had a cast in her eye after that! Her eye was as straight as the other. Work that one out!

I don't believe that it is as much fun or as safe as it once was to play on that common. It is a shame, but there you are, times change. Thank you Common for all the fun you gave me.

Diane's brother Peter Jones, when we used to live at 15 Blendon Terrace, on his motor bike with a friend on pillion, junction of Hudson Road and St Margaret's Terrace.

Family History Of Michael Edward Radley

Michael Edward Radley

I was born on the 22nd January 1942 in St Helen's Hospital, Hastings, Sussex, the only child of Frederick Walter Radley (born 22 Sep 1904, died 26 May 1978) and Margaret Beatrice Ticehurst (born 21 December 1915, died 19 October 1967.) My father was the youngest son of Edgar James Cooper Radley and Charlotte (nee Wells) of Plumstead. To my knowledge, he had two brothers, Edgar Charles and Albert, and three sisters, Annie, Dora and Emily. Another brother, Edgar William, died very young. They lived at 186 Plumstead High Street. I believe dear granddad was the son of an upper middle class family, but because of his heavy drinking, was ostracised by the family. (My father's cousin was Sir Gordon Radley, Chairman of the 'Radley Commission' into airline pilots conditions in the 1960's). However, the two sides of the family never met. (*See also the note in Julia King's family history of the Day Family, in Vol 2 of book Common Folk.*)

My dad, Frederick Walter, worked in the cable manufacturing company of Johnson and Philips, Charlton, especially during the war years, 1939-1945. He was always very self conscious of the fact that, working in a reserved occupation, was not eligible to join H.M. Forces. It was many years later I found that apart from manufacturing many varieties of electrical cables, he was also involved in manufacturing 'PLUTO' (Pipe Line Under The Ocean). This was the essential fuel supply pipeline from the Isle of Wight to the invasion beaches of Normandy. Without it the allied invasion of France, during 1944, would have quickly faltered. Nevertheless, he always suffered a mild inferiority complex because, unlike his brothers, he had not served in the armed services.

My mother, named Margaret Beatrice, but always called "Pat", was born and grew up in Hastings. She became a nurse, much to the disapproval of her Roman Catholic mother, Beatrice Ethel Ticehurst (nee Bumstead). She continued until the war and her marriage. She and the Ticehurst family were evacuated from the Hastings area, a high probability invasion area in 1940, to Ilminster in Somerset. It was here that mum and dad were married in 1941.

After my birth in 1942, mum and I remained in Hastings, dad stayed in Plumstead with his brothers and sisters. About 1943/1944 dad and mum purchased a house at 212 Plumstead High Street, next to the 'Chic Cleaners' on the corner of Plumstead High Street and Riverdale Road, near dad's family at 186 Plumstead High Street. I believe we moved from Hastings to this property about this date, but in 1944 with the advent of the German V1 and V2 attacks on London, mum and I moved back to Hastings, dad remaining in Plumstead.

About 1944 I met my lifelong friend Arnold Day. He and his sister Julia and family lived at 206 Plumstead High Street. My earliest memories of Arnold were of him standing on the top of an Anderson Shelter yelling "they're coming mum !" They" being the V1 flying bombs directed at London.

When Arnold went to Purrett Road Primary at age five, mother managed to enrol me aged about four there too. However, at the end of the school year 1945/46 she transferred me and my friend Christopher Nie to Conway Primary, in Gallosson Road. (Arnold, Christopher and I became known as the "Three Musketeers," because we did so much together.

Primary school was a happy time. I still have the notes I made during a school journey from Conway School to the Isle of Wight in May 1953. After primary school, all three of us gained grammar school places after our 11+ examinations. Arnold went to St Olaves and St Saviours School at Tower Bridge, London; Christopher went to the Haberdasher's Aske's Hatcham School in New Cross and I went to Shooters Hill School in Red Lion Lane, Woolwich, opposite the Woolwich Royal Military Academy.

So began five years of grammar school. Science studies were fine but I just could not master French. As for physical education I hated rugby and cricket but became very proficient at swimming. After taking the GCE examinations in 1958 Chris Nie joined the London fire Brigade after a short period in commerce. Arnold and I both continued in the sixth form to study for "A" Levels," Arnold in the arts and myself in the science subjects of mathematics, physics and chemistry. In 1960, having gained "A" level passes, Arnold joined the Civil Service while I obtained an experimental chemistry position with the Wellcome Foundation Ltd., at their pharmaceutical manufacturing plant at Dartford in Kent.

While my parents were not sufficiently affluent to enable me to go to university, the Wellcome Foundation Ltd. provided their technicians the opportunity to attend part-time day release courses at the Woolwich Polytechnic and other colleges in Kent and S E London. Like others, I enrolled in a course that enabled me to gain a Bachelor of Science degree of the University of London in Chemistry and Physics. While working for the Wellcome Foundation Ltd., I later became a "Qualified Person" in the pharmaceutical industry within Europe, enabling me to release pharmaceuticals from manufacture to the dispensing pharmacist.

In 1950, Chris, Arnold and I had attended the Wolf Cubs at St Paul's Church Plumstead and the Sunday School at Cage Lane Mission church, Lakedale Road, Plumstead. (This became the Cage Lane Evangelical Free Church under the leadership of the Rev HJ Ludbrook). During this period of my adolescence I became aware of the female form. (Indeed, attending the Cage Lane Sunday School was Joan Dowling, who provided you with another most interesting history summary. (*See story; Joan Dowling Reminiscences in Vol 1 Common Folk.*) She was one of the young ladies I worshipped from afar, but never had the courage to date. However, it was at Cage Lane I met, courted and eventually married my dear wife Jean. Born Jean Pamela Morris, (born 13 August 1935, died 8 December 1998) we had a long and troubled courtship. Being six years older than me, Jean and I were always very conscious, in our twenties, of this age difference. After our second break-up, Jean left both home and her job as clerk in charge of a sub-post office to become a House Mother at the Eastry Children's Home near Sandwich, Kent. However, we eventually saw sense and married on 9th September 1967, just after the award of my B.Sc degree. We continued to live in Plumstead; Jean continuing as an officer in the churches Girl's Brigade Company and I as Assistant Scoutmaster in its Scout Troop.

Cage Lane Mission, 1880. This corner frontage was badly damaged in WWII.

In 1968 we purchased a property in Chatham, Kent, where house prices were significantly cheaper than in S E London. I continued working for the Wellcome Foundation Ltd. while Jean continued for a while with the Civil Service Inspectorate of Fighting Vehicles and Mechanical Equipment at Chattenden, Kent. However, her real calling was in the Post Office. She was clerk in charge of a sub post office when we first began courting and some years after moving to Chatham she obtained another post in this work having left the civil Service to raise our two children, Denise Margaret (born 1969) and Nigel Francis (born 1971). They attended local schools. Denise married Robert Peter Young in November 1989 and lives near me in Chatham. They presented me with a wonderful grandson, Michael Peter Young, in 1990. Denise is a medical secretary working at our local hospital. She became interested in psychology and is now studying for a degree in psychology with the Open University. Robert is a carpenter working all over S E England. Grandson Michael has left school and studying animal husbandry at Hadlow College, Kent. His favourite subject is the care and breeding of wolves. To see full grown wolves licking his hand like pet dogs is an eye opening experience. I just hope it represents friendship rather than a future meal !

My son Nigel now lives in Leeds. On leaving school he also joined the Wellcome Foundation and followed father's footsteps, gaining a degree in Chemistry from the University of Kent by a course of part time study. He later gave up chemistry due to the closure of the Rhone Poulenc Rorer site in Dagenham to which he had transferred from the Wellcome Foundation Ltd Dartford. He subsequently qualified as a climbing instructor and set up his own business in West Yorkshire. The business was developing nicely until the terrorist attacks in New York and London after which the tourist business took a marked decline. He is now working

as a civilian assistant with the West Yorkshire Police Criminal Intelligence Department.

In 1995, with many others, I was made redundant from the Wellcome Foundation Ltd Dartford. Soon after I joined Jacobs Engineering Ltd at Croydon, Surrey. My qualifications as a chemist and "Qualified Person" in the pharmaceutical industry were of value to advise engineers designing pharmaceutical production plant. (As for engineering, I just about know the difference between a screwdriver and a spanner!) However, this provided a most satisfying period of about nine years travelling all over Europe advising on pharmaceutical and analytical laboratory requirements within the pharmaceutical industry. Tragically, it was during this period that my dear wife Jean lost her battle with cancer and died in December 1998.

I took voluntary retirement from Jacobs Engineering Ltd in 1994 when they moved from Croydon to Reading. This enabled me to indulge my hobby as an organist. I began playing back in about 1958 at the Cage Lane Evangelical Free Church. After moving to Chatham in 1968, I joined the choir of St Phillip and St James Church, Walderslade, but soon became organist. Similarly, after moving our worship to St William's church in Walderslade, one's talents soon become noticed and eventually became organist at St William's. I now have the privilege of playing at various churches throughout the Medway Towns here in Kent. I even occasionally play at children's services at Rochester Cathedral.

2008

Cage Lane Mission in 1998.
Brewery Road entrance.

Cage Lane Mission from the Lakedale and Brewery Road junction.
This is where the 1880 photo was taken. But owing to WWII bomb damage the original frontage was removed.

Photos: Bert Hooper.

Fire Picquet

Charles Theobald

When I was called up I had to go to Woolwich. I had been in the Army for about two months when I had to do fire Picquet.

At Woolwich, there is a large building called the Rotunda. Inside the building was a museum of the weapons used over the ages. Our job was to patrol the flat roof and look for any lights showing. It was cold with about three inches of snow on the flat roof. There were two of us doing two hour shifts. My sparring partner said "I am going to sit down behind the sandbags" He did so and I was on my own. Then I heard some very strange noises, they came out of the sky, a loud hissing sound and a flapping noise. It got louder and louder and then I saw it. I ducked down as a barrage balloon floated by. When I ducked my rifle was pointed up and the balloon just touched the muzzle as it passed. I had to phone down to the Corporal and tell him about the balloon. The phone was behind my sparring partner!! He was fast asleep, and could I wake him up, never before had I met such a dozy b..... Eventually he awoke, but would he pass the phone over? At last I managed to get through to the Corporal, he came up to the roof and I explained about the balloon. He had just woken up and was just as dopey and just as I thought I had got through to him he said "I know what happened, you have been asleep in the dug out and dreamed all of this" I was speechless, he could think what he liked.

Eventually, 6am came and we made our way back to the barracks. Across the road was the balloon, it had finished up against a row of houses. Beside the balloon was an ambulance. I was told the lady of the house had had a heart attack.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

First Experience Of War

by Derrick Grady

I was nine years old when war was declared on Sept. 3rd. 1939. I lived at our family home in Bexleyheath, Kent. My father worked as a maintenance engineer at Woolwich Arsenal. As it transpired, Bexleyheath was to become a point on the direct route of the Luftwaffe into London during the whole of the Battle of Britain and the Blitz which succeeded it.

On the day that German bombers first attacked London in day light, my twin brother and I, together with some other friends were trying out our new, to us, second-hand bikes by riding to Bostall Heath, Plumstead, to look at what was happening on the Barrage Balloon site which was a great attraction for us kids. Suddenly, the balloon on "our" site started to lift rapidly into the air. One of the R.A.F. balloon crew came over to the wire mesh fence and said urgently, "Something big's happening! You kids had better get off home!" He was right, we could see Barrage Balloons rising everywhere we looked. We got our bikes and moved to a place where we could get a better view.

We looked down river, (the Thames,) toward Erith and Gravesend and saw an enormous fleet of aircraft flying in tight formation right up the Thames Estuary. Literally, the sky was black with aircraft. As this huge mass of aeroplanes got quickly nearer, we could see other smaller planes diving into the formations, attacking them. We could hear the machine guns quite clearly. The anti aircraft guns nearby could not fire because of our own aircraft. This was the Luftwaffe coming to bomb London docks and the East End of London which surrounded them.

We now knew why the aircraftsman had told us to go home. We went as fast as our legs could turn the pedals. The pillar of smoke and, at night, the red fires lasted for at least two days.

With kind thanks for this story to:'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

Happy Memories Of A Woolwich Childhood

Iris Emily Bryen

I was born on the 24th April 1934, Iris Emily Bryen, in a basement flat in a house in Borgard Road, Woolwich, at No 3I think. I was born into a happy family and had a lovely two year old brother Alan. There were two girls living in a flat upstairs, Alan and I liked them, they smiled and laughed a lot, almost part of our family. One of my earliest memories would be when I was three or four years old, standing with my brother outside our house in Borgard Road feeling very happy. I was dressed in a beautiful white organza dress trimmed with satin; relatives were telling me how pretty I looked; we must have been going to a special family occasion.

Me aged 18 months outside No 3 Borgard Road

My dad's family lived quite near. His older sister lived in Borgard Road too. My dad was the youngest of a large family; aunt Fran (the eldest child) had grown-up children when I was born. One of her sons, cousin Alec, was a dray-man and would call in for lunch, leaving his horse and cart outside. All of us kids would be out there, Alec would put a big leather bag round the horses neck and he would have his lunch too. The horse looked huge to us kids! Alec was a 'big bloke' and used to be an amateur wrestler. If you won a fight then your reward wasn't money but lovely prizes, canteens of cutlery, cut glass vases. He must have been a good wrestler because whenever I was in aunt Fran's house she always had lovely things dotted about. These 'things' were handy if, one week, you were a bit hard up and needed to pay a visit to the Pawnbrokers!

Me c1936 with one of the girls living in the flat above us at No 3 Borgard Road

My mother came from the other side of the water, the Isle Of Dogs. To reach the Isle you had to go across the lock gates on foot. An adventure really, but I was always frightened on the iron bridge which would move about a lot. She had lots of brothers and sisters. My grandmother, grannie Vallens, owned a shop on the 'Island'. Very lucrative, the only shop there. She sold everything. Cheese was cut with a wire, butter was patted into shape, bacon was sliced on a big slicer, tea, sugar, dried vegetables and flour. All

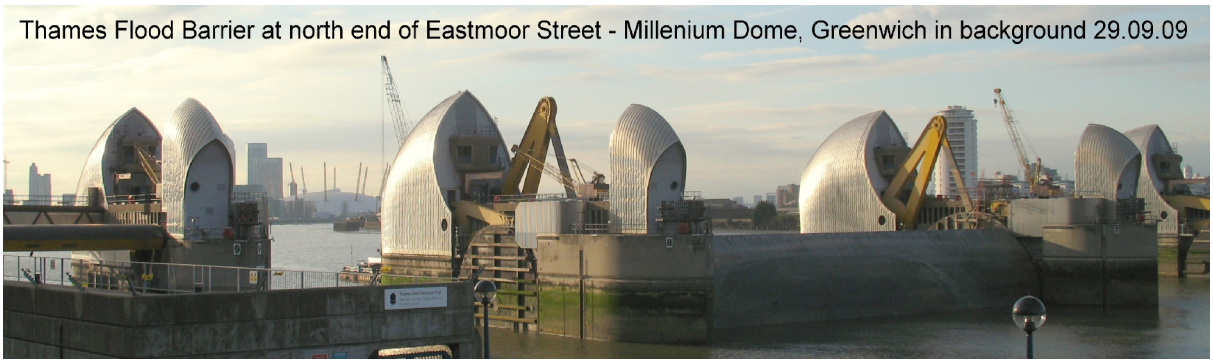
these would be in big coarse sacks and scooped out as required and weighed. Lots of customers couldn't pay right away, so had to buy 'on tick' and pay later. My grandmother was also a money lender. She always wore a large leather belt around her waist to keep the money safe. She wouldn't write anything down on paper, all calculations were done in her head. Mum would take me and Alan to see grannie Vallens; we loved it there and would help in the shop. Gran was a bit awesome, she wore high necked dresses and long dangly earrings and had lovely long necklaces made of jet black beads, marquisette, coral and gold filigree, they were quite beautiful. One of my uncles was a 'bookies runner' and would take bets on the corner outside gran's shop. If a policeman came into view the runner would run like hell, of course the copper would chase him because it was illegal to take bets then. Another uncle, Robert, was gassed whilst serving in the army in the 1914-18 war. He was sent home but sadly he died soon afterwards, I still have a medal of uncle Bob's.

We didn't have television in those days but everyone had a wireless and some had pianos, kept in the 'front room'. You only went into the front room on high days and holidays, or if you had a party. Dad's side of the family loved a party. My mum would play the piano (self taught) and all the old songs would be sung; although young, I knew all of them off by heart. Dancing, jigging about, people singing at the top of their voices, everyone was welcome and it would all end up in a glorious 'Knees up Mother Brown'. Everyone had their own favourite song, my dad's was 'Let Me Call You Sweetheart', uncle Fred would belt out 'It's a Sin to Tell a Lie'. Whenever I heard these songs, I would associate them with different members of the family. The parties were wonderful! I don't remember hard liquor being drunk, it was always beer. Brown Ale for the men and port and lemonade for the ladies. How times have changed!

The Crown public house corner of Eastmoor Place & Hardens Manorway 29.09.09

When I was about three years old we moved to another house in Woolwich, in Eastmoor Street, No 145 comes to mind. An entire house to ourselves and grannie and granddad Bryen lived next door. Gran used to say “always keep your hands busy”. She taught me how to knit and sew. She always seemed to be sitting at her Singer sewing machine and gave me scraps of material to dress my dolls with. Opposite our house was a pub called The Crown. All the Bryens met up there on a Saturday night. Lots of singing and laughter spilling out onto the pavement. All of us kids outside, lemonade each and a packet of crisps with a little blue bag of salt inside. Utter bliss! The 'Gov'na' of The Crown had a pet monkey, kept in a cage at the back of the pub. A big cage, occasionally we were allowed in to see it. I was very timid and wouldn't go near it. I remember the monkey had clothes on once, red trousers and a jacket, I wonder why?

Sadly Eastmoor Street wasn't good for everybody. When aunt Fran lived there she lost her five year old son Charlie, he drowned in The River Thames, which was at the top of the road near our houses. It's now the location of the Thames Flood Barrier, but when I was growing up it drew the local children like magnets, all the boys in the area played near the waters edge. Tragically, little Charlie fell in and drowned. Health and safety regulations didn't exist then!


Thames Flood Barrier at north end of Eastmoor Street - Millenium Dome, Greenwich in background 29.09.09

I loved going to gran's next door in Eastmoor Street, especially when my older cousins were getting ready to go out dancing. I would curl up in the big leather armchair beside the fire and watch them putting on their party frocks, beautiful dresses with sweetheart necklines and flared skirts which you could twirl around in. The dresses were gorgeous, all home made with loving care by my gran; she was a wonderful dressmaker! I spent a lot of time with grannie Bryen, living next door made it easy. Granddad grew lots of vegetables in his garden and I remember sitting on the back doorstep shucking peas for gran. I would take one pea out of every pod and eat it! In the corner of the kitchen was a brick boiler which had to be filled by hand, bucket after bucket. Monday was washing day and the kitchen would be full of steam all day long. The washing had to be passed through a mangle in the garden and I loved turning the handle. A thick piece of blanket would be put on the table to do the ironing; the iron was made hot on the fire. No bathrooms in those days, we used tin baths that would hang on the fence outside the back door. No modern time saving appliances then; gran worked hard but never moaned about the chores. And boy, she was a good cook too! She seemed to cook for so many people. Stews, meat pies and pastry that melted in your mouth. Everything was home made, how wonderful life was back then in so many ways.

As a five year old girl I went to a tap dancing school, it was held in a big room above The Crown Pub. It had large mirrors at one end of the room and bars to hold onto, to learn deportment! It was a great little dance troupe and I loved my black tap dancing shoes with red ribbons tied in a bow. Such excitement, we were going to perform in a local theatre; it was the talk of Eastmoor Street! Alas, war was declared and it was all cancelled; lots of very

unhappy five year old little girls!

I remember everyone was crowded round the wireless, knowing what was coming but not quite believing it. Then reality, the sombre voice of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain telling the nation that we were at war with Germany. It didn't mean much to me then, it was 3rd September 1939 and I was a small child, but what must it have been like for our parents and family! The news must have chilled their hearts; no one could possibly imagine how the next few years would change our lives and what horrors were to come.

Prime Minister Chamberlain

Holidays At Allhallows On Sea.

Lyn Davidson

In 1932, the local council proposed to make Allhalows on Sea the biggest holiday resort in Europe, to entice Londoners to holiday there. In 1937, it was reported the Amusement Park will be four times the size of the famous one at Blackpool, with Zoological Gardens, Yachting Centre, Physical Training Stadium, the largest Swimming Pool in the country, with artificial waves, a Holiday Camp and 5,000 Houses.

Whether it would have materialised, who knows. But World War II came along and that was the end of that.

1935, my nan and granddad: Charlie and Alice Fuller, Allhallows.

My nan and granddad first went to Allhallows in 1935. On Friday nights throughout the summer my granddad came home from work and with all the camping gear packed, the family went off to Plumstead Station to catch the train to Gravesend, where they changed for the Allhallows steam train, pulling only two red carriages.

It must have been quite a feat to trudge down to the station with the tent and the cooking utensils, the bedding and the such likes. Then on Sunday evening they packed it all up again to do the return journey home.

1945 Charlie (Sonny) and Alice Fuller. Going home, Allhallows.

For the bedding my nan stitched two sheets together and when they arrived at the camp they

despatched the children off to fill them with straw from the local farm. Saturday night was the night for a sing-a-long round the camp fire, when one of the family played the accordion.

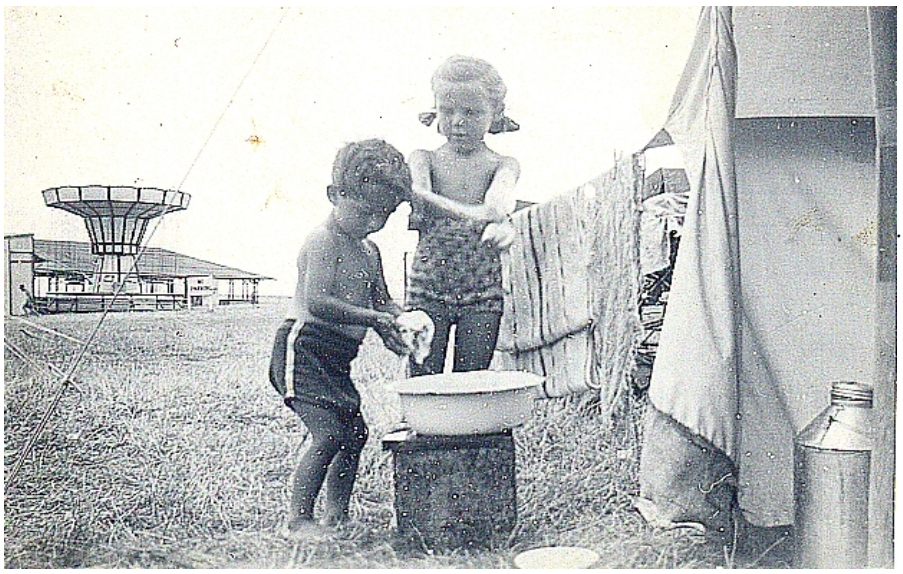
1936 Charlie Fuller with his two daughters Dorothy and Pauline

The family continued to frequent Allhallows until the 1960's when the trip was reduced to Sunday afternoons by car.

1945 Joan Fuller with her mum, Alice.

1939 My mum Joan Fuller with sister Pauline.

Allhalows Station and the steam train.



1952. My brother Brian Sales and me.

1963, left to right: Ron Cox, Bill Sales, Pauline Cox nee Fuller, Alice Fuller, Joan Sales nee Fuller, Children Martin Cox and Tricia Cox.

Home Guards

Arthur Brady

Everyone knows about the funny side of the Home Guard through watching episodes of 'Dad's Army' which have been shown from time to time on the BBC T.V. Although these volunteers were considered to be comical, some of whom were too young or too old to enlist in the 'proper army', they were all intentioned, often well trained, once the equipment was available, and really keen. I'm not sure that today's youth would be as committed as these would-be soldiers were at that time.

My two friends, Charlie Buss and Pete Morley, both aged 17 joined the home guard when we worked together at Siemens Brothers in Woolwich. I was waiting to enter the Royal Navy. At weekends the training became more serious and my mates were in a patrol trying to break into Woolwich Arsenal, thereby testing out the capabilities of their own Home Guard army who would be defending the factory.

The Woolwich Arsenal wall had an extremely high wall all along its perimeter. This was some 20 feet high and was topped with barbed wire. It was formidable! The main gate was enormous and it had been in place since 1820. Other gates, known as the second, third etc. were not quite so big, although all of them would have kept most marauders out.

My colleague, Charlie Buss, being a Corporal, was bringing up the rear of the file of Home Guards when they went Indian file fashion past the main gate. When he was almost past it, it opened and an arm came out and quietly pulled him in. The gate closed and the rest of the patrol proceeded with one man, their Corporal, short.

This was described to me on Monday morning when Charlie returned to work. He could see the funny side of it and he went on to say that even though, technically he was a prisoner, the Arsenal crew were good to him, taking him to the canteen for a meal.

I recounted this tale to my brother, who was ten years, my senior, when I got home from work. It became even more humorous when my brother, who was a member of the Arsenal home Guard, told me that it was he who had yanked Charlie through the gate and supplied his dinner at the canteen.

On another occasion, because the outside Home Guard couldn't invade the Arsenal, which covered a very large area down to the River Thames, the full-time regular Scots Guards were invited to try. Their plan was to board a barge in the river and land from that side as it had no wall to surmount. What they had overlooked was that the Arsenal possessed the world's largest floating crane, magnetic grabs and all. The barge, being made of metal was an easy thing to lock on to by the crane when the occupants, still in the barge, was lifted bodily out of the water – another failed attempt!

Although they caused a lot of laughs, at that very serious time the men did a lot of useful work guarding the bridges, coasts etc. thereby relieving regular soldiers who were able to get on with the job of winning the war.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC.

Hot Cocoa & Tommy Trinder

Rosemary Marler

I was about four or five years old during the war ... and lived in London. We stayed in a cottage that was owned by a friend of my father's. Mum got a job in army munitions and dad was based at Woolwich.

I can remember bombs dropping and being taken to a shelter and given hot cocoa to drink. The children - including me - enjoyed the air-raids because it meant we got biscuits, hot cocoa and the grown-ups would sing songs to us.

I can also remember being taken to the theatre ... the Woolwich Empire and the Greenwich Theatre. We saw Tommy Trinder and Max Wall. I was only five years old and my father was concerned that they might be too smutty. But mum said we were too young and probably wouldn't understand it anyway!

The theatre was very popular - and my mum loved going out.

Dad was sent to Italy and France. He loved Italy but my mother was very suspicious of Italian women!

Dad liked to entertain everyone ... he could play the accordion, mouth organ and ukulele. We would all sit around singing songs while he played. He also entertained the troops with his music ...

When dad came home, we moved to Cheshire. I can remember seeing the POWs being marched up and down the roads for exercise ... they looked so young.

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How Times Have Changed

Mary Parnell

My paternal grandmother was a Head. She was born in Conyer Essex. She met my grandfather in Woolwich when he was a Gunner in the RA Barracks. My parents were both born in the married quarters in Brookhill Road Woolwich although they didn't meet until they were in their 20's. I was born in August 1928 in Hartville Road Plumstead and after a couple of moves, one to Dagenham and then Woolwich, we eventually settled in 17 Saunders Road Plumstead when I was five and a half years old. Saunders Road runs between Riverdale and Purrett Roads which both lead up to Winn's Common. Two other roads ran down from Saunders to Plumstead High Street, being Speranza Road which adjoins Riverdale and Rippolson Road halfway along towards Purrett. We had a fairly long garden which ended with a wall about 6ft. high on our side with a deep drop to the Council depot on the other, where the dust lorries were kept. My father's chicken shed was built against the wall and I spent many hours on top of this watching the comings and goings in the council yard below. This is now, I believe, incorporated into the Plumstead Leisure Centre.

I grew up in the era of the corner shop and we had 4 four shops in close proximity; a general grocers on the corner of Riverdale and Speranza, one at number 13 which changed hands and trades from time to time and on the two corners of Saunders and Rippolson were general stores; on our side was Perkins and on the other was run by two unmarried sisters, the two Misses Ivemy, with quite different temperaments. The one who usually served in the shop was a sweet gentle soul, the other was a piano teacher and as my knuckles have cause to know, was a sharp impatient lady.

I started attending what was at that time Purrett Road Junior mixed school, but it has now been rebuilt and renamed Gallions Mount. I was in the Infants section going into the Primary at age seven. At the time I didn't think anything strange about the class numbering system though it was unusual as it started at 7 and went down 6,5,4,3,2,1, as the ages went up. I loved History but wasn't too keen on Geography which only consisted of tracing maps and then putting them up against a window to go over again so they were the correct way round. We had what was called Nature Study where sometimes we would be led, in crocodile style walk, up to the Common to a place called Bowman's Hollow. It was probably named after someone called Bowman but at that time I used to imagine Robin Hood type fellows roaming there with bows and arrows.

In those days it was safe for children to wander at leisure and I went now and again to the RACS Sports Ground at the bottom of Church Manorway. It had a small stream running along side it and I took the well known bent pin on string to fish for Sticklebacks, usually came home with an empty jar but plenty of mud on me.

There seemed to be a season for various games which would change overnight without any decision being made by anyone. One day we would all be playing with whips and tops and suddenly it would be marbles or perhaps fag (cigarette) cards. In the summer we looked out for the Wall's ice cream man on his tricycle and in the winter the Muffin man walking with a tray on his head and ringing a hand bell and calling out 'Muffins for sale'.

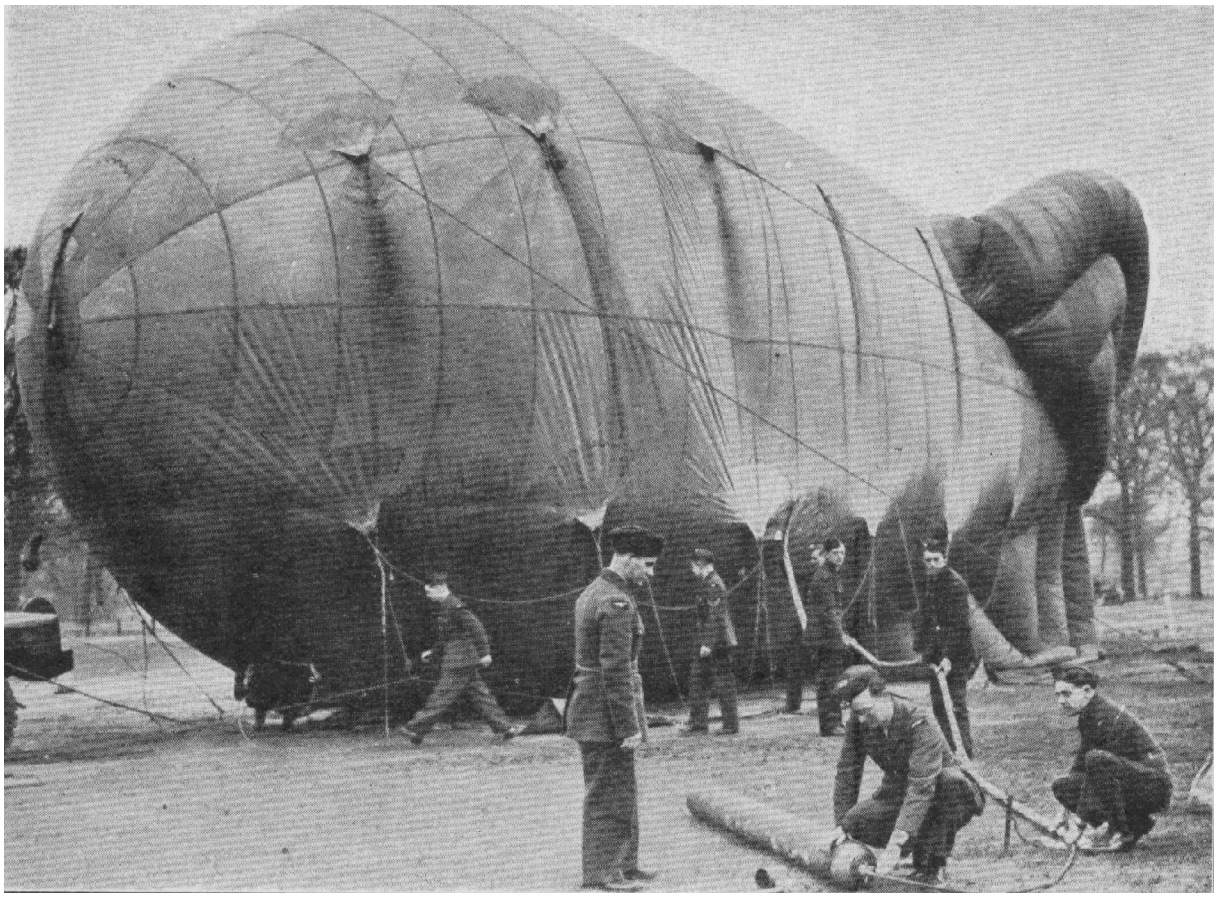
At the top of Riverdale Road there was a small turning branching off, called Viewland Road and on the downward side a flight of cement steps leading to a wooden Congregational church where I attended Sunday school and Brownies. I later became a Girl Guide and after that a Sea Ranger but not there.

In 1939, when war was imminent, another amusement (to us) appeared. A Barrage Balloon arrived on Winn's Common at the top of Riverdale Road and we would congregate to watch it being elevated and lowered again.

It was enormous when seen from close-up.

Plumstead has certainly changed since those days and I have recently discovered that even our old house is now an accountancy business.

I lived in Saunders Road from 1934 until moving to Bishop's Stortford in 1956 and thence to Australia in 1963.



Barrage Balloon being readied for elevation WWII.

It Pays To Be Late

on behalf of Margaret Gratton

I was on a radar course in Woolwich when the doodlebugs were flying over. We were in civvy billets and walked to Woolwich Polytechnic each morning. One morning we were late leaving and as soon as we started walking, a doodlebug started to descend. We dived down on to the road and heard a terrific crash. As we gathered ourselves together again and resumed walking we discovered the doodlebug had landed exactly where we would have been had we left the billet on time.

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John Plater's Memories

We lived in a house in Glyndon Road Plumstead and my older brother Alan and me attended Conway Road School, after which I went on to Plum Lane School.

I remember when attending Conway of how, after much provocation, beating the school bully at Conway Road and then being beaten up in turn by the bully's sister! Of coming home from school in darkness. (daylight saving.) My children and grandchildren cannot comprehend that it gets dark at 3pm in the English winter.

I went on to Woolwich Polytechnic and recall being caned daily (Not for what I had done but for what I was likely to do, and I was the class dux!)

My aunt Ethel worked in a grocery store in Eltham. In those post war days of strict rationing, my mother used to purchase the family groceries from the store where her sister worked. As a young child, it was my task to travel to Eltham and procure the items my mother listed. The manager of the store was Mr Brown who maintained a beady eye on myself and my aunt in the shop. Notwithstanding his surveillance, my aunt would top up the shopping bag with forbidden goods at great risk to herself. Mr Brown obviously suspected and may even have turned a blind eye. I will never know.

I can remember asking my father how chickens masticated without teeth. He explained that they swallowed grit to break up the food in their stomach. Now there was an elderly local personality without teeth who used to waddle past our house every day. I suggested to my parents that he must have a need to swallow grit.

From that day forth he became known as the immortal "Gritman".

Our local soccer team in those days was Charlton Athletic. Dad used to take Alan and myself

Mum, Lily, and me and brother John c.1942.

to all the home fixtures at the Valley by train. I have fond memories of seeing the likes of Sam Bartram, Stanley Matthews and Mortenson, Nat Lofthouse, (Bolton Wanderers) Jackie Milburn and even The Compton Bros.

We used to attend Sunday School, which was run by one of Rev Millman's colleagues who was a cranky testy old man. One day I done an unpardonable thing and pulled his chair from under him as he sat down. He was a portly gent and hit the floor hard. He then uttered a stream of obscenities in my direction which truly shocked me. It took me another ten years to grasp their meaning.

Dad took my brother and me on a trip to Southend-on Sea in Essex, The Londoner's weekend retreat, and we went out in the pier, the longest pier in Britain at that time.

Dad Alan and me, in middle, on Southend Pier, c1949'ish.

In general, I recall exploring bombed ruins of factories and falling through the floor of one. Balmy sunny days (whatever happened to them) playing cricket on the Common with our friends Alan and David Butler. Holidays in Christchurch and at Clacton. Yes, being beaten up one week after leaving hospital, following a bout of pneumonia.

The point is that we had nothing material but still enjoyed happy childhoods. We made our own entertainment etc.
In all, a wonderful childhood that I will never forget.

See also the story: My Early Years In Plumstead by John's sister Diane Hagan and brother Alan, in Vol 2 of the book Common Folk.

Just A Memory

Mark Weightman

So many years ago, I am now almost 72 years of age, I remember as a seven year-old-boy, crossing the Charing Cross Dartford Railway line with my schoolmates Barry Guard and Billy Hodge one-dinner-break from Conway Road School. We walked to Barry Guard's home in Marmadon Road. His mother and father were at work and it was the practise in those days to attach the front door key to a length of string and retrieve it by putting your fingers through the letter box and pull the string up with the key dangling on the end and unlock your door. We all walked through the house out the back door and climbed over the fence at the bottom of his garden onto the busy southern railway line tracks. It was raining hard and we were getting very wet. I had my first pair of long trousers that my mum had bought from Earls Stores, just round the corner from Lakedale Road, in Plumstead High Street. (The trousers had a semblance of a crease to begin with and the material was like a felt carpet underlay!) Whilst crossing the rail tracks, Billy Hodge casually said that the rail in the middle is electrified, you gotta jump over that one! Strange, but all that concerned me was that there wasn't a train coming. The reason for our excursion across those tracks was to get some bird eggs from the sparrows which nested in the rafters of the shunting sheds. We all returned to school wet through but alive!! My last year at Conway Road school was not so happy for many of my class mates or myself under a certain teacher Mr Legg. He reduced many of us kids to tears, ranting and raving. He was a fat bull necked man who seemed only to smile when he played snooker in the school hall at lunch breaks, in the company of younger lady teachers. Years later, I met one of my class mates, Joyce Morris, at a dance, she lived in Earl Rise, she recalled how much Mr Legg was disliked and was such a horrible man. Friday afternoons was my best time whilst in his class when Mr Lovatt, the sports master, would enter and request that I leave the class room for the team talk for the Saturday morning soccer game. (I was in the school team) Mr Legg would sneer and shout at me to leave the class. Barry Guard, Billy Hodge and I went on to Wickham Lane Secondary Modern. On leaving school, Barry Guard had a brief spell in the RAF for his National Service, after which he was a chief swimming bath attendant.

Last I heard of Billy Hodge was that he had a building company. After I completed my National Service in the Royal Signals, I took up my trade as a barber and ran my own salon in Folkestone in Kent for 36 years.

(2010)

Just Another Common Kid

Colin Weightman

I was born in the upstairs front bedroom of 71 Sladedale Road, 8th of June 1944, two days after the 'D Day' landings. Hitler had just launched his new terror weapons, the dreaded V1 flying bombs and, soon after them, the V2 rockets at us in Britain and especially over the skies of London.

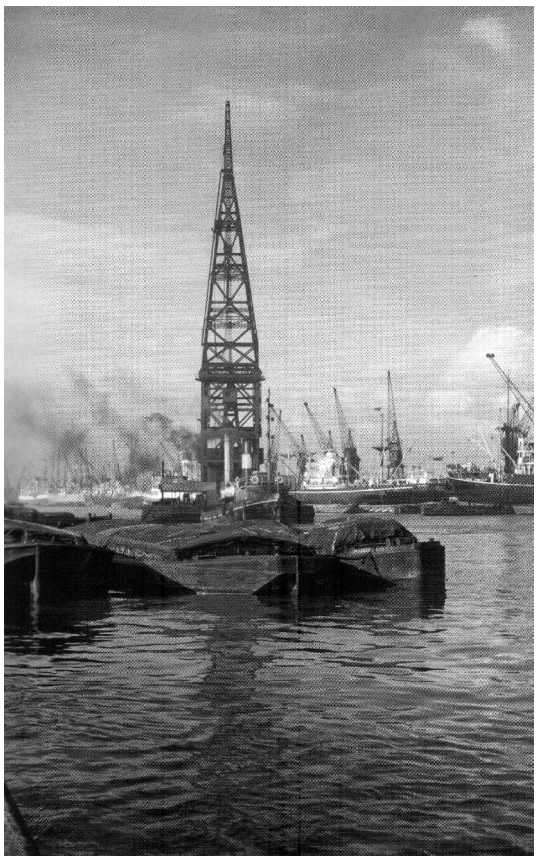
Luckily for me, I don't remember the war, only the growing up after it and the playing on the many bombsites that dotted our area in those days.

I have many fond childhood memories growing up in Plumstead and Woolwich, of the commons, the woods, those wonderful nature filled environments us kids practically lived amongst.

WOOLWICH FREE FERRY (OLD BOAT)

We used to play and cruise on those grand old paddleboats of the old Woolwich Free Ferry and I remember them with much fondness, as us young kids would pack some sandwiches, an apple or banana and take off for a great day full of promise and adventure. We could decide to go there on the tram, costing about a 1d, or instead choose to walk to Woolwich and buy some sweets with the penny instead. The ferry trip was always full of interest with the sights and sounds and the smell of the large coal-fired steam engines that drove the two large side paddle wheels and to watch the big revolving piston shafts pumping away. The constant ringing of the telegraph bells signalling the many changes in the speed and paddle wheel direction as those busy ferry boats manoeuvred the very active stretch of the Thames, whilst fighting the often strong flowing river currents.

At North Woolwich we'd head along to the docks. The first docks had the drawbridges (See photo) holding up the traffic when raised to let the ships into King George V dock, or into the lock gates on their way out. The second bridge, was the swing bridge. This would swing sideways to let the ships in and out of the Royal Albert Dock and lock gates. These particular docks had the famous 'Mammoth'', a floating crane, moored in the dock next to the road. It was the largest floating crane in the world in those days. (See photo) The docks were also the largest docks in the world at that time, very busy and were often packed full of ships from every corner of the world and many famous old ships used these docks in their hey-day. We'd watch them as they passed through the lock gates. We'd call up to the seamen on their ship in the lock gates, asking them for any matchboxes to add to our collections of foreign matchbox labels.



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

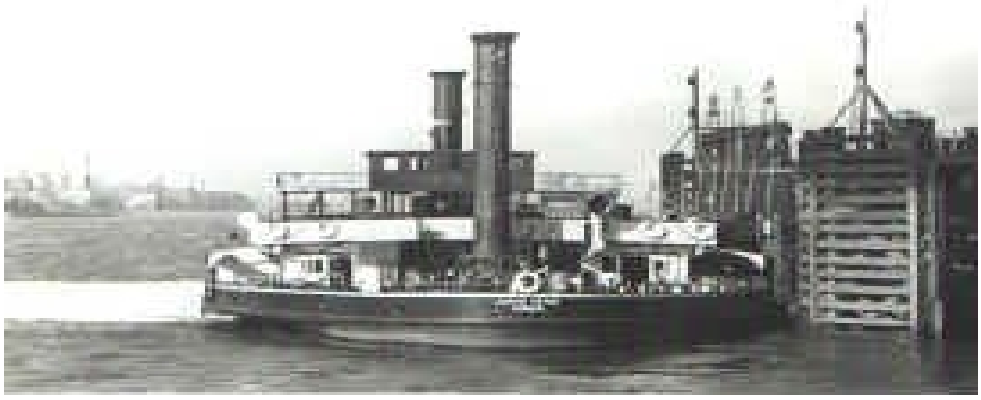
Road drawbridge is up as a ship enters the KGV Docks. Photo: RS Rawlings 1950.

The entrance to the lock gates had wooden piers with steps leading down to the river where we'd play; if the tide was out, we'd search along the muddy beach for any old treasures, slowly getting caked in smelly Thames mud, we'd soon look like happy little Thames mud larks, proper flipping urchins, our hands, legs and clothes splotched in mud.

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

On the way home, we'd often go back through the foot tunnel, racing the lift down to the bottom to the long 1/8 mile paved foot tunnel, walking along in our childish awe in the

knowledge that we were actually walking under the cold dark water and mud of the Thames. We'd run and race each other along the white glazed brick tunnel, our voices echoing back at us as we shouted and called out in our childhood exuberance and playful happiness. At the other end, we'd often race the lift up the spiralling staircase, back into the bright daylight world once again. And all this activity without hardly getting out of breath;.....and enjoying the whole day out only spending about a flipping penny, a very cheap day out indeed for us young Common folk.



Woolwich Free Ferry John Benn.

Woolwich Foot Tunnel and Lift.

The Common.

Colin, aged about eight.

Us kids would smuggle some spuds from home, along with some matches and a bit of striker from the matchbox and sneak over to the furthest recesses of Wynn's Common, down into the holly bushes by St Nick's Hospital wall, gather dead twigs and dry grass and build a campfire in the clearings we made inside these big bushes. We'd skewer a spud on a pointed green stick and hold it over the flames. We loved to sit around the crackling fire whilst slowly turning our smoke blackened scorched raw spuds. It really brought out some instinctive primitive satisfaction, which was, after all, just under our mischievous skins anyway!

By carefully keeping the fire supplied with twigs and dry grass we'd keep the tell tale smoke down to a minimum so as not to attract the dreaded Park Keeper and if he did show up we'd scarper, running in all directions to avoid getting caught. We'd pretend to smoke, drawing smoke through smouldering hollow stems of dry grass, or even smoke the tobacco from discarded cigarette butts that we'd find in the gutters. We learnt to do this from the many displaced men and the tramps as they filed along the streets on their late afternoon journey to the doss house, situated along Plumstead High Street near to St Nick's Hospital, picking up discarded cigarette butts on their way.

Although our spuds were only ever cooked to a depth of about a millionth of an inch and our smoking made us cough and choke and our reddend eyes streamed with tears, we all agreed how good it all was!

A silly stunt that we used to play, was to set light to the gorse bushes which grew in isolated clumps along the Lakedale Road side of of the Commons slopes. We'd light the fire and race down to the fire station on the corner of Lakedale Road and Plumstead High Street, push the big fire alarm button on the wall outside and tell the firemen where the fire was. If you were lucky you might even get a lift up in the fire engine to show where the fire was. Another kid split on Ken and me and a copper came to our house telling our mums what we'd been up to. After a bleeding good hiding, we were marched down to Plumstead Police Station to a very stern lecture and more clips round our ears before being marched back home, being reminded every step of the way of how we were going to get another hiding from dad when we got back home!

The Lake Districts

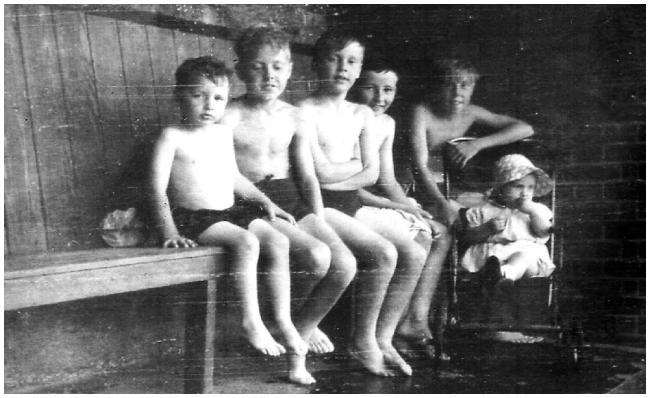
"Y'ever had a barf, Billy"

"Yes, I once fell in the Serpentine."

As Common kids, we would often disappear up into the dark recesses of the pipe that fed out into the ravine pond. We called this pond the "Dirty Lake". The pipe was a fascinating echoing underground netherworld of trickling water that beckoned us Common kids into its cavernous kingdom, inviting us in to explore...but never by yourself...always with a mate; in fact the more mates the better as this collective courage enabled us to waddle like ducks up into the pipe's considerable length, eventually to an iron grill that barred us adventurous kids from exploring any further into its depths, which was just as well, as we kids would still be travelling up that pipe if it were not for that grill.

There were many large spiders living in this dark concrete cave and you tried to keep your head down as you waddled along so as to prevent your hair brushing the cobwebs above and collecting a large spider hitching a ride on you! There were also very large brown moths which had a black hard shell-like covering on their back that also lived in the dark recesses of the pipe. They

hung in the crevices where the pipes joined together, along with the spiders. Moths being nocturnal, they'd hang around in the dark pipe during the day and fly out at night.



Right, Paddling Pool, Winn's Common, c.1949. From left, Colin, Arthur (Collins) brother's John & Mark, Brian (Collins) My sister Ann is in the pushchair.

In those days it was a smelly, muddy pond with an iron railing fence surrounding it. We'd climb over the railing into the lake area and walk around through the trees and shrubs that grew around the lake which was in two sections with an island at its centre. You got onto the island by balancing along the dividing slippery concrete partition of the lake. This was where many a Common kid had his extra bath for the week! You were never a Common kid unless you were baptised in the Dirty Lake. And what a baptism! Water was never a Common kids favourite element, at least, not to actually get flipping immersed in the 'orrible stuff! To play around it, sure. To paddle in it, sure. To catch frogs, king newts and sticklebacks out of, sure. But to get fully into the stuff: no way! But there wasn't a Common kid that didn't fall into the 'orrible, stinking, cold smelly, dark and very *wet* water of the Dirty Lake. It was a magnet that attracted us Common kids, you either slipped, fell, or were 'accidentally' pushed into it; it always got you in the end. In fact, more than once did I find myself floundering in its stinking muddy waters and have to trudge home in sloshing shoes, in dripping cold saturated clothes and to a telling off, clip round the ear and then a warm change of clothes and a hot cup of cha.

Ravine Pond c2004. Photo Alan Gibbs.

Another 'Lake' was the 'clean lake', the paddling pool. The paddling pool was a shallow, blue painted pool that us Common kids enjoyed our very first under water dives in. Being at least around about a whole 12 inches deep, on a good day, this was quite adventurous and very exciting for a tiny 24-inch Common kid to sit in, to splash in and, with much fear, and gathering much courage, to actually put your head right into and underneath its clear, (chlorinated-smelling stinging eyes) waters. On a hot summer's day it was a great trip out with your bigger brothers, to splash, run and doggy paddle swim or just to sit in.

Parents could sit and watch, have a picnic and chat. We'd get dried and dressed in the open changing shed, feeling a bit embarrassed at our public display of our bits and pieces!

Another good use of the 'clean lake' was to sail your model yacht on it. On a windy day it cut through the choppy water at great speed. I'd set the angle of the metal rudder on its stern and send it on a great arching sail through the crashing waves, leaning right over, its white sails nearly swamped, but its heavy metal keel would hold it up against the wind. Such were the simple adventures of us wee Common kids, enjoying our very own special 'Lake Districts'.

Paddling Pool, Winn's Common. c.1949. Left, Brother John, Colin (centre) Right, Brother Mark, in centre front is Arthur Collins.

Christmas time

Christmas was a very exciting time for us Common kids, with fond memories of.....

Of...

Saving my 6d pocket money for buying Christmas presents, instead of the usual weekly indulging myself, buying sweets from the corner shop, and actually feeling very excited about what I was going to buy with my sparse stash of saved up pocket money.

Of...

Excitedly making paper chains in our classroom at school and cutting different coloured sheets of paper into strips and gluing them into interlocking circles, forming them into ever growing coloured paper chains. Remembering the sheer pleasure of seeing these paper chains being hung up, transforming our drab classrooms into multi coloured fairy grottos, and all this being achieved by our own wonderful handiwork.

Of...

Mum, busy as ever, shopping, struggling happily up that hill each day with heavy shopping bags, and me, a little fella, giving mum a hand by holding on to a shopping bag

handle, sharing its heavy weight, well I thought I was helping mum. Bringing home the large chicken and the big turkey, the pre-ordered cooked ham, along with the oranges, tangerines, Brussels sprouts and other veggies for the Christmas feast. All paid for by mum's Co-op Christmas savings and her Divi payments! The fresh peas, to be shelled by us kids sitting out in the back garden, bundled in scarves and jackets to stay warm, happily popping the pods and spilling the peas into a large saucepan that we sat around; at least those peas that survived from popping into our mouths first!

Of...

Wonderful smells wafting enticingly from the oven warmed scullery at all hours of the day and night, along with busy, busy sounds of mixing, stirring and whipping of ingredients in large china mixing bowls. Sultanas, currants, glazed cherries, spices, and sticky coloured fruit peels, "can I have some mum?" Fruity smells of jellies melting in moulds of steaming hot water, flour covered table tops, cake tins lined with margarine wrapping paper, half full with soft cake mix ready for the hot oven. Wooden mixing spoons covered in delicious sweet tasting sticky cake mix..."Yes, you can lick the spoon"...Ah, sheer luxury! Bottles of cream from the milkman, and watching him quickly sip his hot cuppa, chatting to mum on the front porch, telling her of how very busy he is, what with the extra work load of so many Christmas orders.

Of…

Plumstead High Street and Lakedale Road shop windows all lit up and full with glittering tinsel sparkling around arrayed Christmas gifts and Yule-tide goodies. The big departmental stores in Woolwich stocked with the wonderful sights, sounds, and smells, of Christmas gifts such as glass jars full of coloured bath crystals and exotic baths salts in neatly wrapped cubes, coloured soaps, scents and perfumes in fancy shaped bottles from afar, everything tied in fancy ribbon bows and a myriad of other colourful smelly things. Brightly coloured toys, to look and wonder at, but alas never to be owned, except in a dream. Christmas carols filling the air, as large fancy brass tills are rung. The compressed air filled tubes shoot encapsulated receipts and money back and forth overhead as the gifts and goods are purchased.

Of...

The wintry trek across Winn's Common, to the silence of Bowman's Hollow, to hunt for some prickly holly branches, with the best display of red berries. Further expeditions to Bostall Woods to find the best and largest prickly seed cases that lay strewn under the heavily laden sweet chestnut trees. Stomping on the prickly cases to extract the shiny brown sweet chestnuts to be roasted in the fire embers on Christmas night.

Of...

Wrapping up warm and going out into the cold dark night air with your mates, to trudge around the hilly streets Carol Singing. Minding to not kick the empty milk bottles, as we boldly gathered in a stranger's porch. Then nervously knocking on the door. On hearing a movement from inside the home, we'd start to sing "While shepherds watched their flocks by night" all the while resisting a very real urge to sing, "When shepherds washed their socks by night all seated round the tub, a bar of Sunlight soap came down and we began

to scrub!" Then, when the door opened, and our small smiling faces were greeted by those of older years, we'd change to the most angelic version of "Silent Night" that was ever heard. Then, later, counting up the many coppers, thru'penny pieces, sixpences, or with luck, even a shilling or two, and dividing it up equally, all to be added towards our other monies saved for presents.

Of...

Going shopping to choose and buy Christmas presents, and the l-o-n-g and careful consideration of price and value of the item. A packet of hair clips for Sally next door, a flannel and a bar of fancy smelling coloured soap for my sister, a comb for my brother, handkerchiefs for dad, a box of lavender bath cubes and a comb for mum... Buying Christmas gift wrap paper and coloured labels and wrapping up the presents, when no one was allowed to look and see what was being wrapped up, or else…!

Carol singer [to partner, whose efforts had not helped the performance]: "Wait till I get you 'ome, Emily. I won't 'alf give you Noel."

Of...

On Christmas Eve a very young five year old boy writing his secret message in large infant scrawled writing on a piece of paper. His most desired requests would then be carefully placed up the chimney of the bedroom's green tiled fireplace, carefully lodging the note in the cast iron damper situated in the chimney flue. Santa Claus surely could never miss this on his way down the chimney that very night. Of lying in our beds, quietly talking to my younger three-year-old sister and sharing our childish thoughts as our excitement grew about getting our presents on Christmas morning, now so very near at long last, as our eyelids grew heavier, after such a very, very long day.

Of...

Christmas Day. Waking up and seeing the presents mysteriously, wondrously and actually piled there, all brightly wrapped, FOR ME at the end of my bed…Oh the shear excitement!

Of…

Christmas roast dinner with rich brown gravy, Christmas pudding, cream, warm mince pies. A bowl of next-door neighbour Sally's famous Christmas sherry and rum soaked trifle. Later, fancy wrapped toffees from a big round tin, seen only on this special day. The annual family gathering in our front room, only used on these special occasions and the treat of a Christmas variety show, from the accumulator battery valve wireless. A bright flickering coal fire and the smell of chestnuts roasting in the ashes under the fire grill, then everyone jumps then laughs as another chestnut explodes with a loud BANG in the fire embers! Breaking open the rock hard Brazil nuts and walnuts with the nutcrackers and

mixing them with the hazel nuts, peanuts, sultanas, wedges of tangerines, and Smiths crisps, untwisting the blue wax paper containing the salt then shaking it well into the crisps. The bottle of port and sherry, only seen at Christmas, being poured out by dad. Cold meats for tea, with jelly and fresh cream, Mackintoshes' lemonade or Tizer orangeade to follow, more warm mince tarts, and a really full belly..."More jelly and cream?"..."Oh yes please mum!"

Of...

Playing outside in the road after our Christmas dinners, chatting excitedly with neighbourhood mates about what we'd all got for Christmas and all the goodies we'd all been eating. Then, later on, back home, we were allowed to stay up till very late and then as tired kids we'd take our new toys up to bed with us. Christmas time! Wondrous days for us Common kids.

School time

I remember my very first day at school aged five. All the kids and their mums were standing around, waiting to be enrolled onto the School Register to start their very first day. Many of the kids started crying when their mums finally left to go home, leaving them there on their own.

Conway Primary School 2005.

Photo: Alan Gibbs.

I was put into Miss Moy's class, who was the infants' teacher. The classroom had folding canvas camp beds that we had to lie on during our mid-afternoon sleep. We were given our very own cloth bag that had small animal pictures sewn onto them, so we could identify them as our own. These hung on the wall by our coat hooks to keep our belongings in.

Conway Infants, c.1949. Colin is seated, front row, second from left. Note the lean of us kids 'cos the photo was taken on the sloping playground!

Later on, as older kids, I remember when we were dished out the cod-liver oil capsules and, after they were given out, two to each child, the playground was covered with golden brown capsules, spat out by many of the kids: great to squash under your shoes.

I also remember the sad polio epidemic and the dreaded polio shots that we lined up

for. We received them in our upper arm, which ached for ages afterwards. I recall Mr Bull, the Headmaster, a large and intimidating man, who always wore his trademark large blue and white spotted bow tie and a flower in the lapel of his blue pinstripe suit (he lived up on Grosmont Road in a big old house overlooking Winn's Common).

Colin aged seven Conway School

I remember the Assemblies held every morning in the school hall and the hymns we sang with so much gusto, accompanied by the piano. One morning at assembly, Mr Bull summoned me to the front, because I'd been talking to a mate. For this offence, in front of the whole school, he commanded me to spell "Elephant". Highly embarrassed at my predicament I began with "E.L.E... F". and the school erupted into laughter. I was so embarrassed, I felt the ground had opened up under me and, very red faced, I was told to return to the assembly.

During assembly, we were assembled into lines of our class. We stood whilst we sang. Occasionally, a child would faint and fall down. This was not too uncommon in those days when some children from poorer families didn't get enough food. We'd sit while listening to speeches and so on. Whilst we sat we fidgeted and as the floor was a wood pattern parquet floor you were in danger of getting a splinter stuck in your backside!

I well remember the boy who had to endure having to stand on the teacher's desk at the front of the class while she removed a splinter with her tweezers from his bare bum on show to the entire class; of both boys and girls! I never ever complained of having a splinter at school after that and I would endure it until I got home for mum to remove it.

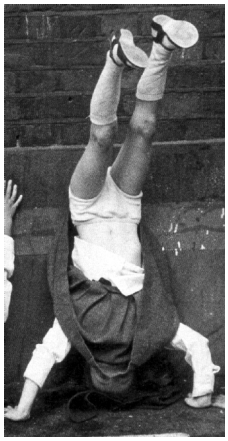
School dinners were held in the assembly hall. We sat at long folding tables and benches. The smell of overcooked boiled cabbage was often thick in the air. The duty teacher would patrol the dinner tables and if you didn't eat enough dinner you couldn't go up for your 'afters' (pudding). There was always usually 'seconds' if you wanted more to eat. Some times I stayed for school dinners but most times I went home for it.

The pig bins were always a smelly sight, lined up out the back of the kitchens in the playground with the slops of the school meals and kitchen waste. This was collected to feed the pigs kept up at the back of St Nicholas Hospital I think. I have heard that one boy would scoop some of this mush from the bin and plop it in the playground, as if he'd been sick. He would then be allowed to go home early. But he got caught doing this trick once too often and was punished for his deceit.

When school was over there was an evening teatime club you could go to for about 6d.

It was held in the Assembly hall and the adjoining classrooms. We could do art or play games. We had hot cocoa and jam sandwiches for tea. I made a picture out of pieces of scrap coloured cloth, which were glued onto some cardboard. Some weeks later I was told my picture was chosen to be exhibited at an art exhibition in Central London. I went with my parents up to London to see it displayed, hanging on the wall with my name proudly labelled beside it.

I remember the two separated playgrounds, with the large wooden door in the wall between them; one playground for the infants and one for the bigger older kids. Also the boy's toilets, next to the girls, by the front gate, on Gallosson Road where we boys held fiercely contended competitions to see who could pee the highest up the urinal wall. (If you were extra clever at peeing too high there was a danger of getting your own back!)



Once, while the girls were playing at their handstands and skipping games, I spotted three pennies on the steps where the girls had tied their skipping rope to the railing. I picked them up and went out of the playground to a shop on the corner of Orissa and Conway Roads where I spent them on three ice-lollies. When I returned, Miss Simms, the playground supervisor, questioned me about the money. I said that I had picked it up on the stairs and had spent it on the lollies, one for my sister, one for a friend and one for me. I was taken up to the Headmistress and was given a lecture on theft and was then put in the cloakroom and was made to stand and watch the ice lollies melt away in a saucer, which took ages and ages. I think I thought the pennies were a lucky 'finders keepers!'

Months later, when my mother had to visit the school for some other reason, she also came to our class to visit my teacher. I was called out to the classroom door as the teacher spoke to my mother. Mum asked my teacher how I was getting on and she replied that I was getting on fine, except for that incident! "What incident?" was my mother's shocked reaction. The teacher gave mum a brief explanation and I got a loud telling off and a good clout round the ear 'ole, in front of the class, who of course were all watching intently. Fifty years later, my younger sister Ann says that it was her that took the money, quite innocently; as she thought she'd found it and then gave it to me; but I'm blow'd if I can remember that!

Now, talking about getting belted, I remember when we were being taught how to speak 'proper' English. The teacher would correct us when we dropped an 'H' or said "fred" instead of "thread" and so on. Well, I mean to say, our natural accent was 'Cockney' just as plain as a Welshman has a 'Taffy' accent and a Scouse has a Liverpool accent..... So there we all were, trying to talk “proper”, just as the teacher insisted we should. Try as she might, she couldn't get us to speak the way she wanted us to pronounce things, or should I say "fings". Some managed to carry out her demands, some unfortunates just couldn't, try as they might. When they kept getting it wrong she punished them. The boys received a hard smack across the knuckles with a ruler; the girls had to stand on their desk seat to receive a hard smack on their thighs. Despite the punishments, these kids still could not pronounce certain words, much to her despair. She'd ask wee Charlie to stand up and say, "Thirty feathers. "Poor unsure Charlie would timidly reply "Tha, tha, firty feavers.” Frail little Rosemary would be asked to say, "Harry's father threads three threads", then with her tiny frame, she'd draw in

as deep a breath as she could and then rapidly reply, " 'Arry's fa'ver freds free freds." Now, years later, Cockney is a recognised legitimate accent, widely spoken without the bad connotations that it generated back in those days of 'Queen's English' as being the only correct way to speak. When I speak in certain company I'm often self conscious, as a result of this stupid bullying we received all those years ago. However, I feel OK nowadays if I say, "Fir'ee fousund feafers on a frushe's froat" or "Bread an' bu'er in the gu'er"!

I recall when the horse-drawn milk float overturned in Bebbington Road at the side of the school. The noise, as you can imagine, was very loud when all the glass milk bottles along with the wire milk crates crashed onto the road when the float tipped over after its wheels mounted the kerb. Something must have spooked the horse. The milkman eventually un-harnessed the frightened horse and walked it up and down the road until it calmed down. What a mess there was on the road: broken glass, tipped over crates and milk running in the gutter. All the kids' faces were pressed against the windows of all the classrooms that over looked the accident scene.

One day whilst walking home from school as I walked up Orissa Road alongside the back of the old Beasley's Brewery buildings, I heard the loud throbbing sound of aeroplane engines. Looking up I saw the planes were flying in formation. Suddenly, two of the planes wings collided and then, it seemed in slow motion, wings and pieces of fuselage broke off and began to fall spinning to earth, followed by the two crippled planes. Being a young child, I wondered if what I was looking at was for real. Later on though, the evening papers were full of the tragic story, with big headlines reporting this spectacular air accident. From memory, I believe that one plane crashed into the Thames and the other into the Plumstead Marshes, with the death of at least one pilot.

Another recollection was outside the gate on Gallosson Road; a rag-and-bone man was parked. He had jars with a goldfish swimming around in them. He said to the kids that if they brought him some clothes he'd exchange the clothes for a goldfish. Well, the result was that lots of kids went scampering off home, soon to return with their 'good' clothes and (remembering that many kids didn't possess any or very little in the way of spare clothing in those days), this was without their parents' knowledge or approval; and they swapped the clothes for the goldfish! This led to the school Head warning the children not to deal with this rag-and-bone man and also told him to go away and so he left.

I remember the Harvest Festivals, when we kids took some produce along, if we could, such as a few spuds or a cabbage. It was all piled up and arrayed in the Assembly hall along with some decorative stooks of corn. The usual singing of such hymns as 'We Plough the Fields and Scatter' and 'All Things Bright And Beautiful'. I think the produce was later given to a local home or hospital. This was the time they judged which child had grown the best nasturtium plant from seeds they had been given weeks earlier. I never managed to win.

Now and then the 'Nit Nurse' would do her rounds of the school. When she got to our classroom we were told to line up: boys in one line and girls in another. We slowly filed towards her as she closely scrutinised each child's hair and head for these pesky little passengers. Her nimble fingers and extra fine metal comb moved deftly and efficiently as straight haired and then curly locked youngsters' heads were pushed this way and that as

each head was thoroughly inspected. Then, wet-haired and cold disinfectant dribbling down our necks, we were done and the comb was dipped back into the beaker full of that strong-smelling disinfectant before it was the next child's turn.

Each year would bring another cycle of seasons. Every day we walked to school and back and often to and fro at dinner times too; we thought nothing of it then; you just did it, in all weathers and in all seasons. Other seasonal things came and went as if by magic, such as the marble season; where you played marbles at school or along the gutters all the way home, being ever mindful of the drains. The cigarette card season, where you flicked your 'fag' card up against the wall, with the fag card nearest to the wall being the winner, and then they took all the other cards behind it. The conker season, when you went over to Bostall Woods, to try and find the biggest, and shiniest, dark brown horse-chestnuts. Then, with a meat skewer, you drilled a hole through the centre of the conker and threaded a string (a bootlace was best) onto it. You then did serious battle with your opponent, each taking it in turns to hit your opponents' conker with your conker, which you held up at arms length for your opponent to hit and try to smash and break it. If you broke your opponent's conker you won and it became a 'Oner'; if your opponent's conker was a niner (nine victories) you took his score and added it to your total and it became a tenner and so on. There were many tricks used trying to harden conkers, such as soaking them in vinegar and/or baking them in the oven.

Plumstead High Street, c.1950.

My younger sister Ann says that when she used to walk to school and back on her own, she was absolutely terrified of the big tall brewery chimney that used to belch great big clouds of black smoke. I only found this out from her around fifty years later on; amazing what went through us Common kids' minds in those distant days.

Errands

Going on errands to the local shops was every child's call of duty it would seem. Sent off on an errand to get a forgotten item, tightly clutching a few coins wrapped in a hastily scrawled note for item(s) required. I remember being sent down the hill by mum to get a portion of chips for my younger sister Ann, who was at home recovering from a cold. On returning home up the hill I checked in between the folds of newspaper for the odd chip lodged in them. I found one chip, which only whet my appetite,. so I sneaked a chip… and then another… and another... Before I knew it, I had eaten most of the chips! On reaching home mum unwrapped them and there was just a few chips left! A good clout and a telling off and I was sent back down the hill to get some more. Another time mum sent me to O'Rourke's the butchers situated in Plumstead High Street. I was sent to get a pound of rump steak from them. On returning home mum unwrapped it and was very angry! She told me to take it

straight back and to tell them that it's horse meat! She was a regular customer at O'Rourke's the butchers. If they'd known who my mum was, they wouldn't have tried to cheat her small son. When she was next at their shop she would have certainly given them a real good Irish telling off!

My dad used to work at O'Rourke's during their peak busy time, just prior to Christmas. Dad had been an apprentice butcher as a boy. So he did know a bit about butchery and fowls. He worked a regular night work job, so this part time seasonal job brought in a few more valuable pounds in at Christmas. His job there was to 'draw' the birds' entrails out and remove the ligaments from their legs. He would process many hundreds of birds during those busy weeks prior to Christmas, slitting the birds rear, insert his hand and draw out its innards, a procedure repeated hundreds of times a day to chickens, ducks, turkeys and pheasants, plus rabbits. I remember his hands would become bright red and get very tender because of the huge volume of items that he processed.

As well as O'Rourke's, mum would shop at the Co-op butchers, at the big RACS stores in Lakedale Road. She'd often buy a pig's head for a shilling (1/-), or half a pig's head for sixpence (6d), which she'd make into some brawn. Dad would cut it up for her and he'd offer me its eyeball staring at me stuck on the tip of his finger and say to me, "Here you are son, this'll see you through the week!" One year mum won the raffle at the Co-op butchers and won a big Christmas hamper. She was so surprised and so very happy, she couldn't believe her good luck!

Another errand that I was occasionally sent on, was when any of us kids got a boil or a sty. Dad would then send me with a jug down to the Beasley's Brewery to get a jug of yeast. I would get this frothy liquid by entering the brewery and then into the yeast settling troughs situated in a big room where the yeast was held in large stone troughs. The brewery worker would dip the jug into the frothy mix and fill the jug with it. Dad reckoned it was the best cure for boils and any such like ailments. On the way home I'd secretly swig a drop of the bitter dark brown liquid that seeped from the frothy yeast which settled in the bottom of the jug. Dad would give us kids a few big desert spoonfuls of this liquid and froth. (*See story: Ted Atkinson Remembers. Beasley Brewery worker)*

I recall when on the way home from school an elderly neighbour, Mrs Thompson, who lived just down the hill from our house, asked me as I passed her gate, "Colin, could you pop down the road and get me a couple of pound of King Edwards?" Off I went, running down the hill to Welch's the greengrocers. On returning she thanked me and gave me a whole two bob bit! I couldn't believe my luck! A whole two shillings just for me, there in my hot little hand! I rushed home and told my mum that I had been on an errand for her friend Mrs Thompson. Mum asked me sternly, "Did she give you anything?" I answered," two shillings." Well, with that mum gave me a clip round the ear with the stern rebuke, "Take it back at once!" I crept back down to her house, through her gate and then slid the money silently through her letterbox. I often thought later, I wonder if Mrs Thompson ever spotted it and, if so, did she wonder where it came from, or did she know? Such were the strong principles held by our parents towards us Common kids in those days.

Later, I scored a paper round from a friend David Jones who lived in Parkdale Road. I inherited Miss H. along with the paper round. The routine was that when I delivered her evening paper I'd make her a cup of tea, which she drank through a bent glass straw from the cup I placed on a bedside cabinet, which she'd lean over and drink from. I'd drop her paper into her as she lay in her bed in the front room. I'd then go up the passage to make her a cuppa in the scullery. Whilst waiting for the kettle to boil, I noticed that she had a large back garden and it was very overgrown. I asked her if it was OK for me to dig it over and make it into a garden and she agreed to this. Happily I would carry my dad's gardening tools around each day and get stuck into it. It had loads of brick rubble, broken glass, tangled wire and other rubbish buried amongst the huge deep-rooted weeds and convulvus grass. (I suppose this was rubble from damage to the house during WWII judging by the amount of broken window glass and brick rubble.) But despite this, I was very happy in the knowledge that I had this entire garden just for myself to use. I soon had it dug over, weeded, and raked over nice and level ready for planting. I planted all kinds of vegetables and some flowers. I learnt how to grow plants for the first time ever, such as celery; and how to put brown paper around it as it grew, and how to grow lettuces, placing elastic bands round the leaves to form a good firm heart, and how to mould up the soil round the sprouting spuds; to make trestles from twigs to train the garden peas; and to tie up string for the runner beans to climb up. I read about why it was important to 'dead head' plants and so much more. I was in my element, I loved it so much, and it was heaven, to watch the seeds sprout and grow was magical to me as a kid, to see my own stuff grow and then to take it home for us all to eat.

As I said, it was my job to deliver Miss H. her paper. I would enter her unlocked, very large front door and into the front passage and then enter into her front room, where she lay in a large double bed. Now the strange thing is that, quite often, as I entered her room with her cuppa, I'd see that she'd quickly put her hands under the bedclothes, rustling quite loudly the open newspaper on her bed. She was supposed to turn the pages with a stick with a rubber on the end that she held in her mouth. She always looked guilty but I never said anything and made out that I saw nothing. But being a young kid, I was a bit put off by seeing this as it gave me the creeps. This would happen all too often. One day, I came to her house, much earlier than my usual time, probably to do some gardening on a Saturday morning. Unexpected by her, I entered into the passage as usual and I looked up at a figure standing on the stair landing. It was Miss H. standing there in her long nightdress! As our eyes met, she let out a scream and I felt my hair stand on end, what with the sudden scream and the sight of her standing there. I quickly walked back outside and went away. After that incident, whenever I delivered her paper and made her cup of tea, I would deliberately make some noise in advance, just to let her know I was there. Neither her nor me ever mentioned anything about that episode. Not so long after that, our family moved away from Plumstead and I had to leave my wonderful gardens that I loved so much. I found out much later, that the Home Help people finally caught her out as a fraud. I felt very sad for her really, but as to what happened to her after that, I don't know.

Sladedale Road, our road

In our road was the Hollow, or as we kids pronounced it, the 'oller, it was a long strip of disused land, stretching for about 120 yards or so between the terraced houses on the ravine side of Sladedale Road. The 'oller was our playground. A sloping strip of wasteland overgrown with weeds and shrubs and had a large central holly bush. Ours was not to be confused with the 'oller' over by the ravine pond or the Birds Nest 'oller.

John, Maureen and Charlie Reed, at their back garden door, 72 Sladedale Road. c.1955.

Our 'oller was the place to be on bonfire night. Maureen Dunmall (nee Reed) recalls, "I remember the bonfire nights we used to have on the wasteland (the 'oller) next to my house, all the children in the street would help build the bonfire weeks before bonfire night, building up the big bonfire with every scrap of wood and anything that we could find that would burn. We'd all congregate there on the big night and let off our fireworks". The guy was sat atop the piled up stack, which was dowsed with petrol and with a whoosh and a ball of flame it was set on fire. Then the fireworks were let off and the fun began. Maureen' and her older brothers, Charlie and John, lived next to the 'oller at number 72. Us boys were close friends as kids, always having lots of adventures together. They could walk directly into the 'oller from their back garden. The 'oller was a good place to build a camp, tunnelling in under the bracken fern, ideal for hiding from others. The fern stems made good arrows and spears to throw at the 'enemy', the roots had hard pointed tips, just the thing for young fighting warriors. Bert Hooper recalls, when as kids down the 'oller, "one rainy summer's day we built a camp, covered it with old lino and bent sheets of corrugated iron, then dragged in an old mattress, a prize find for us kids. We all found out later though, when we had been bitten all over with itchy red spots, that our camp mattress was infested with fleas!" My good mate David Morrison, known to us kids as the 'Professor', lived a couple of doors from me. He never really mixed a great deal with us other kids too much. I always wondered why he hardly ever played down the 'oller with us. It was Bert who explained years later to me. It was only when his mother was working down at Morgan's, in Lakedale Road, did David manage to sneak out and enjoy joining in with us on our adventures, apparently, because his mother didn't allow him to play in such an uncouth place as the 'oller, and I 'spose she was quite right in her estimation when you compared its environment to that of playing over on the Common instead.

The 'oller was also a short cut through to Roydene Road, via a bombsite. This bombsite was also a good source of bricks, to stack and build huts with. These 'huts' could survive sustained heavy bombing attacks from the big clods of turf and pieces of brick we'd fling

during the many wars us kids enacted very vigorously against each other.

The lower end of the 'oller was where the public air raid shelters were once situated during WWII. These were accessed via a flight of concrete stairs from Sladedale Road, all these now long gone.**See story: Dick (Cyril) Dixey Remembers. Vol 1 Common Folk.* In this area was a plant called 'Jack Wood'. It was a bamboo plant. We'd cut it and make peashooters from the hollow stems. The 'peas' we used for 'ammo' came from an elderberry plant that grew nearby. We'd fill our mouths with tiny unripe green elderberry fruit and rapidly fire them at each other through the homemade peashooters, stinging legs when hit from close range! (These peashooters were not nearly as powerful as the all-metal peashooters we bought from the Home & Colonial Store near Plumstead Fire Station, where we also bought a bag of hard yellow peas to use as ammo' as well.) This elderberry bush would produce creamy white fragrant smelling flowers in the summer that eventually ripened into the juicy dark blue elderberries. I collected the tiny caterpillars that fed on this plant and kept them in a large jam jar where they would spin cocoons and emerge later as a small black and white spotted Tiger moths. I would then release them, back onto to the elderberry bush.

I collected many kinds and types of insects from the 'oller. One time I dug up a lot of brown shiny cocoons and put them in one of my jars; not long after this I had a jar teeming with blue bottle flies! Without thinking, I took the lid off the jar and soon had a room full of large buzzing flies! I loved studying insects and the 'oller was a good hunting ground. I had quite a few jars in my bedroom with live specimens in. One day I was in the living room. I had a jar containing wood lice (slaters). I was looking at the way the females carried the tiny pink babies around, all clinging to the underside of their bodies. The vicar, from St Patrick's, was on one of his visits, to our house and whilst having a cuppa he asked me what I had in the jar and innocently I said, "I've got some lice in the jar" My mother suddenly became quite agitated, gruffly telling me to go outside and play. It puzzled me why she was so grumpy with me.

The 'oller was where we'd play hide and seek in the long grass and small shrubs that grew there. The 'oller, was where I found a stolen hand bag and purse and another time a battered stolen Wrigley's chewing gum machine one morning foraging down the 'oller, it was all bent and battered, and broken open, lying in the long grass, minus the packets of chewing gum and the money. Mum and dad contacted the police and a copper came and collected it and rode off on his bicycle with the machine wedged sideways on his rear carrier; such were the thrills of the wee Common kid. The 'oller, where one day I found a whole pound note stuck in the base of the fence! The 'oller, where we learnt about the differences 'tween boys and girls! The 'oller, where I fell headlong into the stinging nettle patch wearing only short trousers and a sloppy Joe. I was covered from head to toe in tingling red bumps from all the stings. I got home very distressed and mum blotched pink Calamine lotion all over my body with cotton wool. The fragrant smelling lotion was so cool and soothing on all of those stinging itchy spots. If we got stung as kids by stinging nettles, a cure was to rub the affected skin with Dock leaves which would relieve the sting.

The ''oller, (This is where the Public Air Raid Shelters were situated during WWII, on the left fenced off part by the end house), Sladedale Road, looking down from junction of Goldsmid Road, (It was on this is spot where the mobile anti-aircraft gun unit positioned itself during air raids in WWII.)
**See story: Dick (Cyril) Dixey Remembers. Vol 1 Common Folk. Photo c.1997 Albert (Bert) Hooper.*

The 'oller was where you could run and hide when your parents were angry with you when you were in trouble.

The 'oller has a row of houses built on two thirds of it now (2007). Only a small part remains of this once well utilised play area. So much enjoyed during that era when kids played outside, often all day long. When there was hardly a television set to be found in a home and long before the Play Stations and computers of today's 'static' indoor generation of kids.

The fox and the cat sunbathing on back garden shed, 71 Sladedale Road. Photo: Elizabeth Downey.

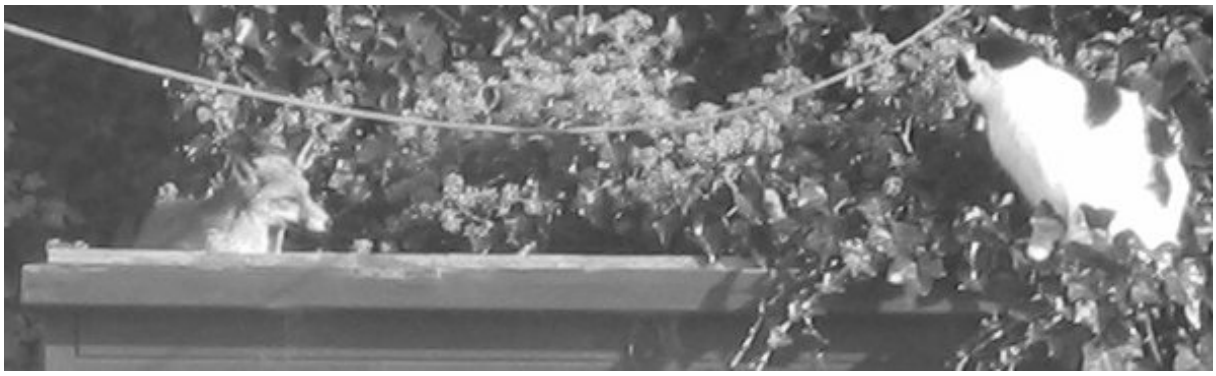
Nowadays, the remaining bit of the original 'oller is well overgrown by shrubs and tangled undergrowth. It has become a small area where nature has been allowed to re-establish itself. There are now foxes that live and breed there, raising their fox cubs.

Elizabeth Downey, who now lives at my old house in Sladedale Road, says, "We often get foxes wandering into our back garden. The fox in the photo is sunbathing on the roof of the garden shed at the bottom of our garden. He and the cat were having a Mexican stand off. For a time we thought he may have been injured or was protecting some cubs, but he just lay

there all day, dozing in the sun. Later in the day he got up, stretched, and went off into the night! We get loads of foxes on the road; they have dens on the scrubland opposite the house (the 'oller). We hear the cubs squawking at night. They're very bold, strolling around even during the day without a care in the world!"

It's so nice to know that the 'oller, as such, is still a playground where future young inhabitants still play, just as us Common kids had done so many years before them.

2007.



Close up of the Fox, on the left, and the cat on the right.

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 frog spawn. When they hatched, the pond was full of black wriggling tadpoles, which we fed with tiny pieces of lettuce and raw meat and chopped worms. My dad would cull them out by a 'netting and stamping' method, saying that it was "natural selection" and was necessary in order to keep a natural balance. We also had a small fenced pen that we kept tortoises in. Every winter they'd hibernate in a small box house which they lived in during the spring and summer months and slept in at night. So once they'd decide it was time to hibernate they just stayed inside the house and we'd fill their home with straw once they hibernated and we'd fill it over with dirt, covering the box completely. Every springtime they would dig their way out. They lived for many years in our back garden and later, when we moved, we gave them to Bert Hooper our neighbour. Unfortunately they were killed by a neighbour's dog a few years after that.

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 c.1949.

Ann holding a tortoise with cousin Alan.

Ken, my deaf next door neighbour friend.

Me aged about four in our back garden c.1948.

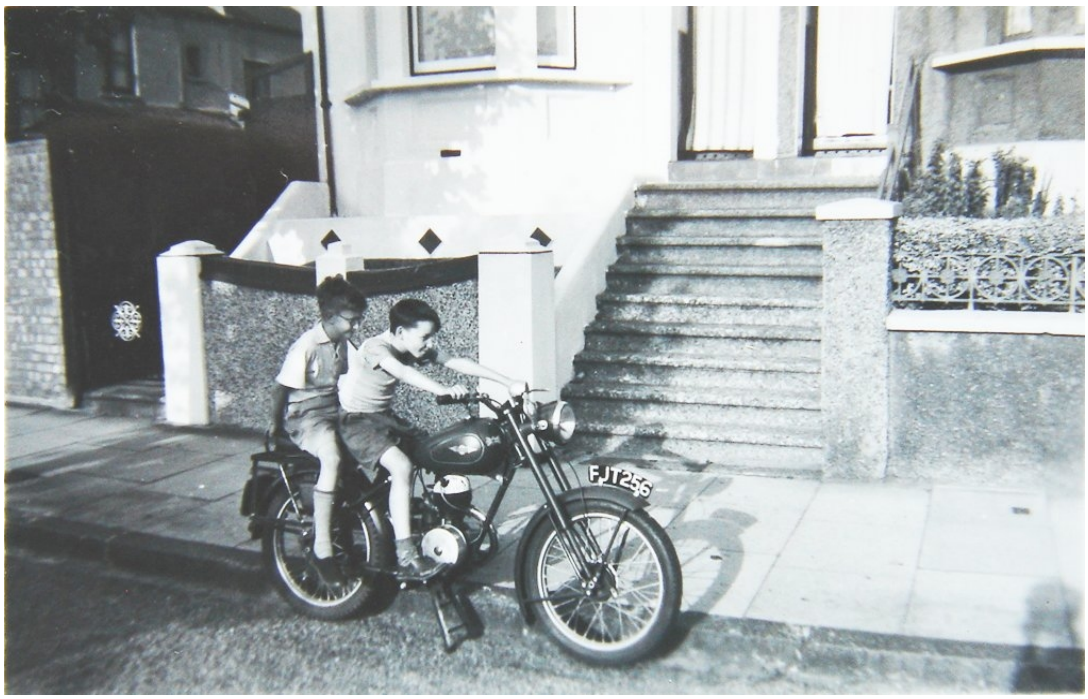
David (professor) Morrison, aged ten, & Charlie Reed, aged eight, Sladedale Rd. c.1956`. Photos: Colin Weightman.

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

Colin and Ken outside 71 and 73 Sladedale road c.1954.

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 c.1948.



David, pillion, and Colin on brother Mark's James motorbike c.1955.

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.

Pig bins

I remember the large heavy-duty pig bins that were distributed throughout all the roads of our local districts. In Sladedale Road 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 often greet you, followed immediately by a breath taking blast of the foulest stinkiest smell. Holding my breath, I would quickly scrape the scraps into this hell hole, then, finally, replace the lid, and now bursting for air, I'd retreat and then take a great big gulp of fresh air!

These pig bins were emptied by the council bin men. They'd tip them into a small curved shaped lorry with side loading 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 to have to endure them any more.

Saturday morning flicks

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 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.)

He'd hide behind the curtain and push the bar on the door opening 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 hitch-hikers 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, (*Vol 2 Common Folk*) 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 Plumstead 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 silver screen and it was peppered with tiny holes.

I remember when Tommy Steel told his recollections about his childhood visits to his local flea pit 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 from 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, which would strike up when announcing Uncle Tom as he bounced onto the stage to 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 as that could've easily have been me! Shortly after this, I saw them both returning down the isle 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 fades away, as did the noise from 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 very firm favourites, as all the kids loudly 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

The former Red Lion pub, left, and the Century Cinema building on right, 2000. Photo: Alan Gibbs.

Frankie Lane, a popular 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." It sure stirred us kids up, we were 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 stars as the Cisco Kid, Roy Rogers and his horse Silver; Batman and Robin; the Lone Ranger and Tonto; Tarzan of the Apes and Jane, Davey Crocket and many more. We kids would get right into the action, all booing and shouting 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 contorted with scowls of anger as we hissed and booed, and in the very next scene were cheering and clapping and laughing again at each dramatic turn of events; all happening right there in front of us. A child's world just didn't get much better than this! Then it was the much looked-forward to 'funny' 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'. Us kids would sit enthralled, eyes wide with intense concern as the story unfolded; you would have heard 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 was hardly a dry eye in the theatre.

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

My start in life

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.

When I was born, the 8th of June, 1944, two days after 'D' day, WWII raged on in Britain and over London 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.

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.

Below, evacuating London's children during the first part of WWII.

Colin, still an evacuee, at about one year old

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

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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.

Sally (Ridge) our lovely next-door neighbour. c.1955.

Bombsites

As a very young toddler, I'd trot along with my mother on her shopping trips. We would often walk long distances into the shopping areas in 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 menacing to pass these sinister bombsites. Ever since those early days whenever I smell soot, those early distant memories come back to me.

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

There were many local bombsites and these were good areas to play on, to play our war games and build huts on, as were all bombsites as they had a good source of old rubble to build with. The pungent smell of soot had diminished during those first few years after the war. We had lots of fun playing on the bombsites, we were unrestricted with the things us kids could get up to, smashing bottles and glass, throwing bricks, bashing and breaking things was all allowed, the noise and the mess we made wasn't a 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.

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

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.

Sunday School

On 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 got to be washed with large rough lumps of strong smelling carbolic or Lifebuoy soap).

Mum and her lovely neighbour Mrs Beacham,at the beach on a Sunday School outing. c.1950.

The Sunday School had an annual outing for us kids and our mums when we 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.

Scouts

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 Scout pack entered into a composition at a big Scouting event, which resulted in us practising for this event by dashing madly round the hall 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 finishing line. The fastest team winning. We practised hard every week for quite a few weeks, rushing around the perimeter of the large hall at breakneck speeds. The heavy barrow had large wooden cartwheels with steel rims and it would skid sideways on the wooden floor as we sped round the corners. My part was to take out the split-pin, grab the left wheel and carry it over obstacle and position it back onto the axle and put split-pin back. We practised regularly and 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, the others with the shaft and the cart body and reassemble it again before tearing off to the finish line.

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 big strapping 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 that practice makes perfect 'cos we cleaned everyone up as the fastest team, winning by a really big margin.

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 a 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 surrounded the entire perimeter of the St Nicholas Hospital building. This fenced area was out of bounds 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 mature 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 smaller shrubs. It truly was a wonderful place to play in, especially for hide and seek and to make secret hidden huts in amongst the long grass and the tangled shrubs, and 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 young imaginations to act out some of our childhood dreams…our very own secret garden.

Footnote:

The Plumstead Common Environment Group (PCEG) has been gifted this piece of land and is preserving it for the public's future enjoyment.

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, c.1958. Photo: Colin Weightman. (Taken on his Brownie box camera)

The local corner shop

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. You could buy a slab of Palm toffee for 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 poked through to suck up the delicious sharp tangy sherbet 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, they'd be considered 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 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).

Right: Len Dickins at the counter with grand show of Easter eggs on show. Left: Welch's old fruit & vege shop, now Dickins,corner Sladedale & Parkdale roads, 1977. Photos Alan Read.

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. Most sweets were sold by the ounce, and our rations of sweets were generally bought in two-ounce amounts.. Gob Stoppers were another favourite at a penny as they were quite big and lasted for ages. As the large ball in your gob was sucked, it changed colours, as it had multi-coloured coatings, so we were forever taking them out of our mouths with our grubby little hands, comparing what new colour was showing and guessing the next colour. These big Gob Stoppers were eventually banned because some kids were 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.

Mum, Maureen Weightman, with Dicken's corner shop in the background. (Corner of Sladedale and Goldsmid Roads)

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 Dickin's and was situated on the corner of Goldsmid Street and Sladedale Road. A lovely elderly couple, Mr & Mrs Dickin's, owned it.

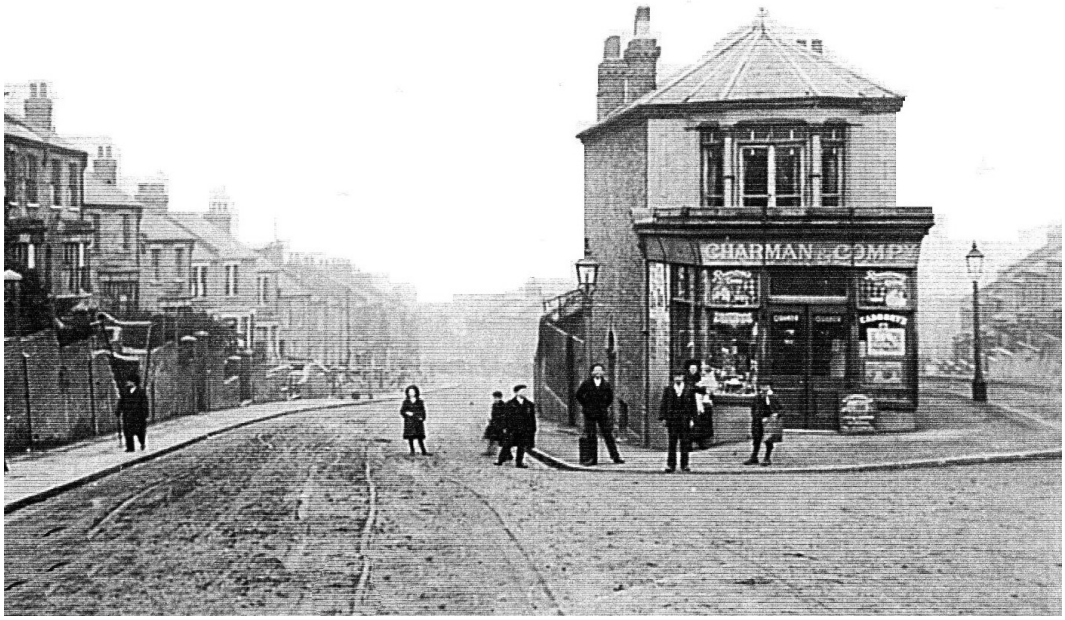
They were related to the Dickin's who had their own shop in Parkdale Road who also later owned another shop on the corner of Parkdale and Sladedale Roads (ex Welsh the Greengrocers) that was run by Lennie Dickin's their son. Dickin's' was a typical corner shop. To us kids, corner shops were known as 'the sweet shop'. These shops had that recognizable smell, a familiar aroma that all these little shops shared, a bouquet that incorporated hints of soap, paraffin, sugary confectioneries, kindling wood, mothballs, cheese and other subtler smells. These shops were often stacked with high shelves that reached the ceilings, arraying 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.

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, compared to the dark red '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. On our birthdays we'd each get a rise 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 Dickin's 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 extra delicious. Dear old Mrs Dickin's, 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 Dickin's' on an errand. It was winter time and she was all wrapped up to go and mum said, "Don't lose 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.

She explained to mum how she had lost the change and mum said not to worry about it, but I'd over-heard them talking and learned that sixpence was lost in the snow so I took the

hearth-shovel and shovelled the snow looking for that sixpence. Mrs Dickin's 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 Dickin's was talking to mum and told her about me digging in the snow for ages looking for the lost sixpence. Mum felt quite embarrassed about this as she thought Mrs Dickin's thought that mum had made me go and dig in the snow for the sixpence, but that sixpence to me was well worth looking for. Another time, my sister was heading down our front steps as our dad came home. Dad asked her where was she going and she said to Dickin's. He asked how much did she have to spend and she said a ha'penny so 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 bell. I stood at the counter and waited for the lady to come out from her living room, just off 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, at eye level to all those marvellous sweets, all 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, keeping my back to her, desperately trying 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 of water and 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!"

Children outside a shop c.1900. (Photo © Children's Society)

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 guessed 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!

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

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 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 Lesnes 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 and the man looked a bit peeved at that. 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, mostly up hill. I well remember how proud I would feel at bringing these goodies home to my parents each week.

Sister Ann, left, and her friend Francis Beacham in front of 71 Sladedale Road c.1955.

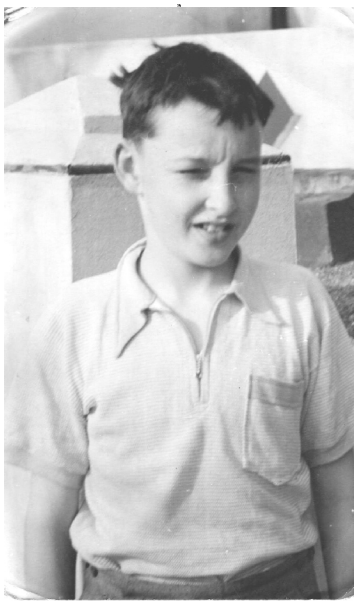
The good uses I put that barrow to, collecting horse manure for the magnificent sum of 2/6d that I've mentioned in another story. (*See: The True Value Of Horses*) The barrow was often loaded with laughing giggling mates as we went off on yet another adventure, pushing each other along at breakneck speeds, 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.

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.



Colin aged 11, Sladedale Road.1955.

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 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, in fact, never 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 es' 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.

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. Whist 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.

Lamp post and drink fountain, corner of Lakedale and Winn's Common roads 1877.

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'd hop aboard and go upstairs, where passengers were allowed to smoke and we'd scan the seats and floor, picking up any discarded matchboxes or matchbook packets. We'd find the occasional discarded daily newspaper and proudly take them home for our parents to read, very resourceful lads we were.

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 dumdum bullets, around 8mm or so. We were told as kids that the dumdum 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 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. As kids, we'd take all these treasures to school to show and compare and to swap with others who also had collections. However, once the 'powers that were' found out about these "dangerous things" we were bringing into the school they banned them, I wonder why?

Keith Joseph Smithers (Joe) Remembers.

What do I remember...:

I was born in Snettisham in Norfolk on the 17th October in 1937. In September 1938. I was adopted. I lived in Bastion Road in Abbey Wood. It was during WWII that I attended junior school, at Bostall Lane School. Sometimes it took a long time to get to school because when the air raid sirens sounded, the thing to do was to knock at the nearest house and ask to use their air raid shelter. This was probably in 1943 or thereabouts. I would walk to school past the R A C S building and I remember the tin checks they issued when you spent money with them. These were then cashed in for a dividend at 'divi' time.

When I could read I would go to the Plumstead Library, which was across the road from the swimming baths which was all part of the same complex. In those days it was either walk or ride your bike to get anywhere.

Opposite our house was Gatling Road which led up to Wickham Lane and right at the end was a boarded up area. I recall there was an underground bunker which we kids would use to play in. Must have been in the 1950's then. The damp smell in the bunker soon went away when we started to play cops and robbers in and around it. Some years later the area became a garage and possibly the bunker was then used to house the petrol tanks.

During the war, Gatling Road had large concrete anti tank structures which stayed until at least 1947 or so. There was, I remember, a barrage balloon in the open grassed area at the end of Bastion Road.

Because of the proximity of our house to the Woolwich Arsenal during the war, our house suffered quite a bit of damage from the bombs, with damage to the front of the house twice and to the back three times. The most severe damage was to the rear of the house when a V 2 rocket fell on the council's allotments. That would have been 1944 when the V 2's started. Before that were the Doodle Bugs, the V1's, which were O K all the time you could hear them, but, when they went quiet... trouble was about to happen! Our family had to spend some time in the Rest Centres as we were bombed out quite often.

Exactly when I cannot remember (early forties), but a German plane came down and the next day it was lying in the rear garden of one of the shops (the second one from Plumstead High Street and Wickham Lane). There did not seem to be much damage to it, a small fighter plane. There was some cleared land behind the shops, but I don't think that's where it came down. Perhaps the newspapers of the time reported it.

It seemed to me that wherever I went to school, after a short while it would be bombed again. I went to a school along Plumstead High Street. Coming from Abbey Wood it was on the right hand side before the Plaza Cinema and Lakedale Road. I think that the top of the school was badly damaged. (Bannockburn Road Primary School)

I went to Bloomfield Road School for boys from September 1949 to July 1954. Teachers I remember were the maths master, Mr Obe, the French teacher, Mr French and the science/chemistry teacher, whose name I think was Mr Chapman (who went to prison for murder).

When the Smogs came, before the clean air act of Parliament, we could not move as the

visibility was down to only a few feet. I was unable to ride my bike so I walked to school, which was about three or four miles, all the time slowly feeling my way through, only to find that it was all in vain; the school was locked! I think the Smog lasted for a few days; this was in the early fifties. The clean air act was in 1949 which made everyone use clean burning coal only.

My father worked for the South Eastern Gas Board and part of his wages was free gas. So we had gas lighting, gas oven, gas fridge, a gas iron and no electricity until 1952 or 1953. Our house was built in 1890; four bedrooms and an inside bathroom but with an external toilet. The house is now split up into flats by the local council.

After leaving school, I worked in the City of London at Lloyd's working with a broker on U S and Canadian shipping insurance. I was called up for National Service in April 1956 to April 1958 and served in Germany, at a small village where the 'Kindacore' sang the Happy Wanderer which was a hit parade song. Obernkirchen was the village in the Scharfoldendorf mountains.

I remember the plane crash which happened around 1953. I was standing in the Bastion Road garden as the fly past went over. They were to the north of us, almost over the Woolwich Arsenal. One plane clipped another and the tail plane broke off and I saw one of the planes fall out of the sky. The other plane I couldn't see, as the roofs of the houses were in the way. I think the plane was a Meteor.

I remember the 1955 floods and went with my younger sister to the Harrow Inn to see the level of flooding that had occurred.

I married Iris Ayers from Welling and we have three children and eight grandchildren. In 1968 we and our three children emigrated to Sydney in Australia. I was the Management Accountant for the Company I worked for in London.

I am still working as a public accountant with my own company in Sydney.

(2010)

Kerr Family Recollections

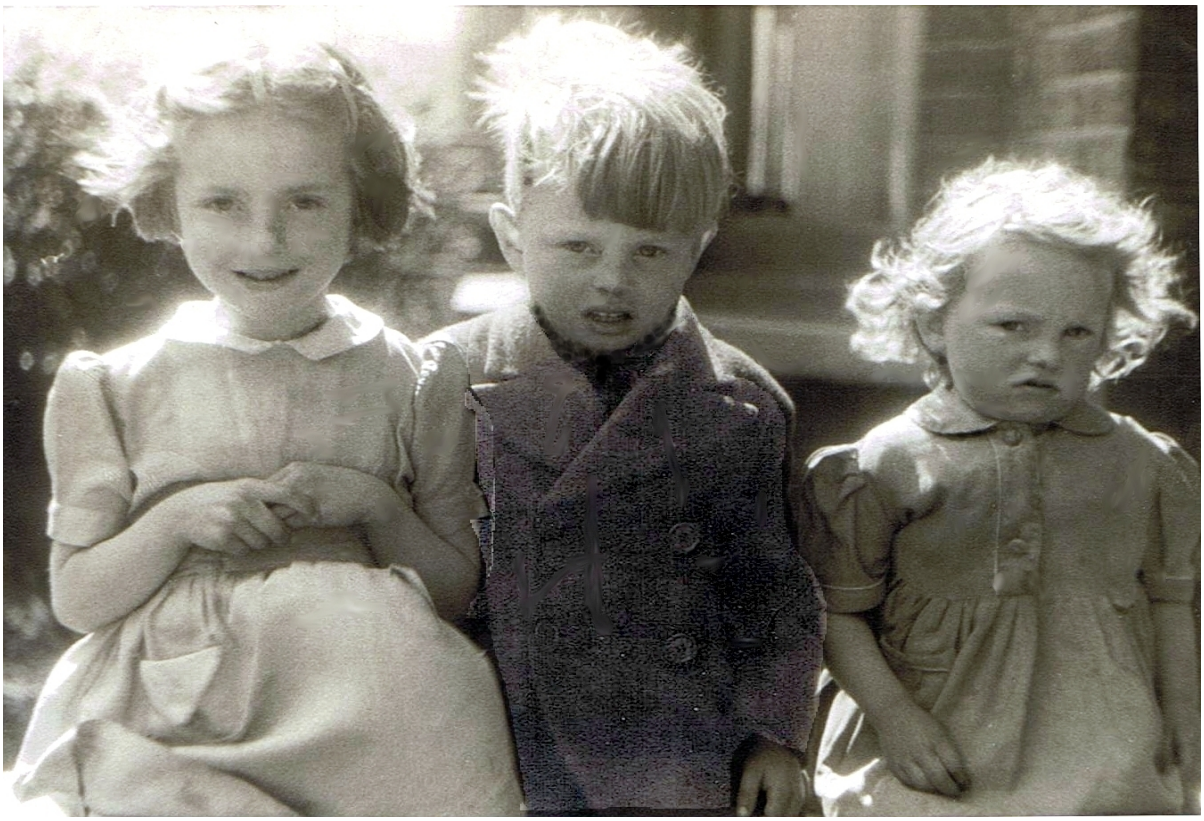
Bruce & Margaret Kerr (nee Rutter)

My name is Margaret Kerr nee Rutter, and my husbands name is Robert, but he was always known as Bruce because his father and him shared the same first name.

Bruce's grandmother on Plumstead High Street in 1939.

My husband and I were both born and raised in Plumstead. I was born and lived at 55 Bannockburn Road, and my husband lived most of his childhood at 123 Marmadon Road. We were married in St Nicholas Church in 1963. We bought the house in Marmadon Road in about 1960. We were able to buy it at the special price of 600 pounds as his parents were sitting tenants. In 1966 we moved to 248 Plumstead Common Road. Bruce's father died in 1973, but his mother continued to live with us. In late 1973 we emigrated to South Australia with our three children and my mother in law.

My earliest memories of Plumstead were attending Bannockburn Road Primary School, from about 1949 until 1956, as I am sure in those days we may have started school at four years of age.



Maureen and Kenny Rutter and me, Margaret Rutter, c1948, on the wall outside 55 Bannockburn Road.

The Headmistress was a Mrs Butler and I remember she was very strict. I think the top of the school had been damaged during the war. I remember when they rebuilt it. We were so excited when it was finished, and we could at last go up those stairs that had always been blocked off.

A lot of our childhood was spent in Plumstead Gardens, a park in Brookdene Road. I remember the skating rink being built and the Lady Mayoress being there to open it. The park also had a paddling pool, and a playground. Also, there was the new park, which had beautifully kept gardens and fish ponds. I remember my cousin falling into the fish pond one day, and my mother having to carry her home soaking wet, It was good we weren't far from her home in Brookdene Road. This new park had strict rules, you weren't allowed in there until you were 16 years old, or unless you were accompanied by someone 16 or over.We, of course,, as children, would dare each other to run into the park, just to annoy the park keeper, who would then chase us out, but we could always run faster than him, trouble was though, he had a good memory, and you would get told off next time he saw you. Later on my husband and I did a lot of our courting in this park.

We had our little gang of friends who all lived in the local area. We went most places together, including the Plumstead Baths They had great swimming pools, and I remember after swimming you could buy a piece of bread and butter and Marmite for 2d. It went down very well when you were starving after a long swim. Also, you could go to the public baths there, for a bath, as most of our homes did not have a bathroom.

I loved the summer evenings in the school holidays. We were allowed to play in the street until it was almost dark, and the ice-cream van would come around. We were always made to go to Sunday school in those days, and I went to the Salvation Army Sunday school, but I can't remember the name of the street it was in. On Mother's Day we were given a daffodil to take home to mum.

Now, for a few of my husband Bruce's memories of growing up in Plumstead.

Bruce, on his bike, 123 Marmadon Road. Next doors is a granddaughter at No 125. Their name was Berry, but can't recall her Christian name.

I was born in Hylton Street in 1942, during WWII. Not long afterwards

our house in Hylton Street was bombed. My father was in the house at the time and was lucky to survive. Our next house was just behind the Post Office in the High Street, but I can't remember the name of the street. We then moved to 123 Marmadon Road.

My brother Ken, dressed as a chimney sweep, with his friend Kenny Phillips, as a clown, at Bannockburn Road School, c1953.

I first went to school at Church Manorway, until I was seven years old, then I had to go to Galleons Mount School (Purret Road). After leaving there, I went to Secondary school at Plum Lane.

My early memories of Marmadon Road were of all of us neighbourhood kids playing our games out in the street, as in those days nobody had cars and it was safe to play in the middle of the road. At the back of our house was the main railway line that ran from London out into Kent. It was also the main shunting line for the Woolwich Arsenal. On the other side of the road I remember there were allotments.

On their allotment in Marmadon Road, c1953. Left to right: a family friend, the tall man in bow tie is Bruce's father, Robert Kerr, Bruce is the taller boy, we don't know the name of the other boy.
Plumstead Gardens can be seen the other side of the fence.

My father had one of these allotments for growing our vegetables. There was also a place

called Drivers, and there was two big wooden sheds on there. The milkman used to leave his milk crates there to pick up later. I got caught one day by the local bobby as I was throwing these crates over the fence. I was going to build a cubby with them, but the policeman stood sternly by, while I was made to put every one of them back!

The 1953 Bannockburn Road School Football Team. My brother Ken is the last boy on the right.

I remember playing in the bombed buildings after the war, then, later on, they put prefabs up for bombed out homeless people to live in.

I attended Sunday school at St Francis Mission on the corner of Bannockburn and Brookdene Roads. I was an altar boy there and I sang in the choir.

Kidbrooke And Shooter's Hill Memories.

June Ellis (nee Barnes)

I moved to the Evelyn Estate Kidbrooke in July 1949 at the age of six with my parents. The estate was built on farmland between Rochester Way and Shooter's Hill. I can well remember going to Hornfair Park on Shooter's Hill, as this was our nearest park, and playing in the children's playground on the swings, roundabouts, playing in the sandpit and paddling in the children's pool, we also used to play games on the fields behind the bowling green. I can remember how exciting it was when we moved to Kidbrooke. We had a house all to ourselves with a bathroom and an indoor toilet and I had a bedroom of my own, but best of all was having a garden to play in; we had moved from Rotherhithe where we had three rooms in a house shared with another family, with no bathroom or indoor toilet much less a garden more of a backyard. I also remember that most food was still on rationing and I used to go with my mum to get the "Rations" each week, which in comparison to today was very meagre, but we did not go hungry and all in all I had a very happy childhood. We mainly went to the shops on the estate where we lived and sometimes I went with my mum to the shops on Shooter's Hill as there were some different shops there.

When my cousins came to stay on Bank Holidays, we were usually treated to a walk in the woods on Shooter's Hill, sometimes, if we were lucky, we walked up to Shooter's Hill and caught the 89 bus, but more often we would walk. We had great fun in the woods playing hide and seek and it was always a rush to see who could reach the castle (Severndroog castle) first. We spent many happy days walking and playing in Castle Woods, and going to Oxleas Woods as well. We often used to take a bat and ball and we would all play rounders with our parents.

Severndroog Castle, Shooter's Hill.

I can remember going shopping in Woolwich on a Saturday; we would get the 89 bus to the Memorial Hospital and then another one to General Gordon Place, but after a bit we are able to catch the 192 bus direct to Woolwich. We often shopped in the market in Beresford Square; my parents looking for any bargains that could be had, and when sweets came off being rationed, I would be given a treat to choose sweets from the huge range that was available, talk about getting let loose in a sweet shop. My dad would also go to a shoe repairers near the market and buy leather so that he could repair all our shoes himself.

At the age of eleven, in 1954, I transferred from Junior School to the newly built Kidbrooke School in Corelli Road, just off of Shooter's Hill; this was the first purpose built comprehensive school in the country, and we had to go to Woolwich to buy the

school uniform from Cuffs, which was a very exciting experience and how proud I felt when I wore it to school for the first time. We sometimes used to walk around the shops and I well remember Garret's and the Co-op as well as Cuffs. We were taken each week from school to Plumstead Baths for swimming lessons; this seemed an adventure as usually I did not go far from home without my parents; on the way home I would go with friends to the Indoor Market which was always full of interesting things.

Coronation Day 1953.Friends living in Dursley Road celebrating Queen Elizabeth II Coronation, 2nd June 1953. In photo: June Barnes, Pat Parrott, Valerie Cox, Diane Cox, Ann Johnson, Margaret Cox.

***Kidbrooke Park Primary** School, Miss O'Hagen's Class.*
This photo was taken at the school in Dursley Road before the school in Hargood Road was built, not sure of the actual date.
In this photo: Michael Ince, Richard Hand, Carol Sparks, John Hall, Roger Wombwell, Sally Allen, Douglas Parker, Barbara Thompson, Dawn Askew, Maureen Mills, Diana Cole, Yvonne Fletcher, Jill Back, Annette Edwards, June Barnes, Miss Ohagan, Lesley Wells, Pamela Hardingm, Diane Greenwood, Pat Whiting, Frances Smith, Delphine Anderson, June Cotton, Mary Albrighton, Patricia Powell, Barbara Crosby, Joyce Coleman, Mary Barker.

Kidbrooke Park Primary School, Mrs Gomm's Class.
Photo was taken in the playground in Hargood Road.
Mr Offord, Headmaster, Bobby Miller, Richard Hand, Annette Edwards, Michael Thorn, Jill Back, Rosemary Brookman, Roger Wombwell, Yvonne Fletcher, Michael Ince, Mrs Gomm, Barbara Thompson, Diana Greenwood, Irene Bolster, June Barnes, Dawn Askew, Maureen Mills, Brenda Ingram, Pat Whiting, Gwenyth Langley, Carol Sparks, Mary Albrighton, Carole May, Dianne Gannon, Brenda Runacre, Jean Wilkinson, Sally Allen, Doris Bills, Judith Wheatley, Pat Powell, Mary Barker Douglas Parker, John Hall, Terry Carter.

As I grew up into my teenage years, I used to go with friends to the Granada and the Odeon cinemas in Woolwich to see the Sunday concerts with the new and upcoming groups of the day. These were very exciting times for me; who would have thought that Cliff Richard and many others would still be giving concerts today; I wonder if they remember those concerts, which gave so much pleasure to us.

I remember going to the local shops on the estate where we lived and going with my mum to the shops on Shooter's Hill as there were some different shops there. I had a 21st Birthday party at the Fox under the Hill public house, which of course holds very happy memories for me.

My mum worked for the Civil Service and sometimes she was seconded to work at the Royal Arsenal and my dad worked for a while at the AMC factory in Plumstead.

(2010)

Lights Out At Seven

on behalf of Maureen Middlemiss

I was evacuated to Peterborough. I must have been about two and a half to three years old, so the memories of it are rather slim, but strangely enough the address has stayed in my mind: 153 Mares Walk. And the two ladies that we were evacuated with, because my mother actually came as well, were the Miss Thompson's, two spinster ladies.

We had been living in Woolwich and I think this is the reason we were evacuated because Woolwich arsenal was very close to us and I do remember my mother almost… well, I don't think she ever got over it — she lost her best friend in a raid which I think was just a street away from us — the houses were just flattened.

I suppose my most vivid memories of being with these other people was that they were very good to me but they were quite strict and I think my mother probably found it harder because we had lights out at 7.00 or something extremely early. I can always remember one of them. One of my favourite toys was my little teddy bear, like most children, and he got wounded and one of the Miss Thompson's bandaged him up; sewed him up for me, so he was OK.

I don't know if we had a raid one day, but I remember we had to go under the dining room table for some reason and I can only think there must have been a raid and they hadn't got a shelter, so we all just dived under the dining room table. But they were an extremely nice couple of ladies — obviously no children; I think they made a fuss of me because of that. But I think my mother missed home, and my father, and we came back, basically to probably worse than what we'd left. My father was in a reserved occupation; he was an electrical cable engineer, so he had to stay behind and my mother was obviously very worried about him.

I have no idea how we got to the Miss Thompson's. I can only think it must have been arranged by my mother and father, mainly because of the area that we were living in. I think it was more for my mother's benefit than mine because she practically had a nervous breakdown and having a small child, she just couldn't cope. I think our house did get hit actually. We didn't find out until… actually I don't know that he ever told my mother; I know he told me not long before he died, they were on trucks going to various places that had been bombed, I suppose to try to reconnect the electric… they were all being fired on and he could remember turning round and seeing the truck behind them actually get hit and on fire and I don't think he ever told my mother about that.

When we came back to Woolwich, we had our own shelter which my father had built in the garden and we seemed to spend an awful lot of time there. I started school at 4. I can remember mum taking me up to kindergarten and bringing me back and I know I had a little bedroom on the side and it's always stayed in my mind; the line in that Vera Lynn song "Jimmy will sleep in his own little room again" and I can remember connecting that to being able to sleep in my little room.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

London Blitz, I Was There

on behalf of Mrs P Flowers

Mr H Lloyd wrote this Story in around 1960, when he was aged 63 years. His daughter found the original hand written script after his death. Mr Lloyd had never spoken about his experience so this was the first she knew of it.

I Was There

Yes, when war was declared on 3rd September 1939, I was a full time Fireman with the A.F.S. No.136 Tottenham Fire Brigade. But, to put my readers in the picture of this story, I must start from the September crisis of 1938, for it was then that I joined the A.F.S. During the following year I was able to complete my training for these duties of fire fighting. So when the call came I reported for duty.

We were made up into crews with a pump and a vehicle of a sort for towing.

Eventually, we arrived at our Post, there to wait the terror we had been promised. Sleeping arrangements were very poor and did not improve with time. Days and weeks went past, in fact 6 months passed by and all was quiet, but not so with the personnel. They were fed up with nothing to do, and then much to everybody's surprise an order came round; any A.R.P or A.F.S. with a job to go to would be released from full time duties. This I did and remained part-time till the end. Now the job I had to go to was with the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society Ltd Funeral Furnishing Dept., Woolwich SE18. This was April 1940. Of course the firm knew I was a fireman. Naturally I soon got fixed with a crew and pump and we used to practice, quite often down by the River Thames, waiting for the day that was not far away. To be precise it was the 7th September 1940. What a day. Almost perfect. Blue skies and so quiet until around about 5pm., when out of the blue the sirens started and before they had finished, there, up above, were the German fighters and bombers coming straight up the Thames, wave after wave. Hundreds. Now I was right in the middle of this, doing my turn of duty at my firm's depot which happens to be known to the people of Woolwich as Commonwealth Buildings, being part of the old Woolwich Dockyard. Here, hundreds of men and women work, food and stores of all kinds are kept, also rolling stock and maintenance generally.

Of course, by this time the staff had gone home, only a few duty men remained. Then when we were looking up in amazement wondering, down came the incendiary bombs by the hundred also with the explosive bombs in between. Within minutes there were fires in all directions. By now it was loud noises everywhere. What guns we had were firing, fire bells, Fire Engines with their bells ringing. Then add the sound of buildings burning, wood crackling and bricks falling and the heat – it was very hard to describe ones feelings, but I'll say it was nothing short of terrible. We had several fires in our Depot and sorry to say we were not very successful, it was just too much for the few on duty. The position was made worse in some cases by the lack of pressure in the water supply and broken pipes. After a while I went down to the River to see if we could use the water and what a picture I saw there. As I stood there on the South Bank facing Silvertown, the River itself appeared to be on fire. The boats, barges and wharfs and behind them, the whole of the dock area was in

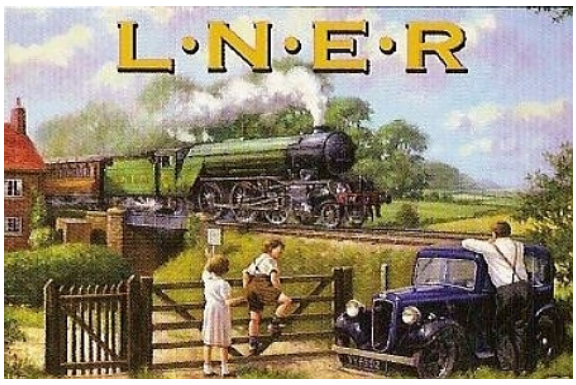
flames. Flames and smoke as far as I could see. The impression and feeling I got was that of being in a ring of fire and very thirsty. After a couple of hours it quietened down, but only just long enough to have a drink it seemed. Then about 8pm the sirens started again and back came the German bombers again and again wave after wave. This time the bombs were mostly high explosive and delayed action. Of course most of the big fires were still burning and more were added to the list.

During the night we had to take cover at times in a small shelter and I can still remember how the ground vibrated beneath me from the explosion of the bombs. In the midst of all this, our milk lorries were already filled and waiting to go to deliver the morning milk, which they did a little late, but all reported safe. At last we see a little daylight and the early morning brings peace again, how thankful we all were.

After I was relieved about 9am Sunday morning I had to make my way home to Tottenham, of course there was no transport, nothing only to start walking. Silvertown and Blackwall Tunnel were closed, so I had to go via Greenwich, Deptford and past Surrey Docks,which was still burning, and on to London Bridge. What a walk, the pavements and roads were covered with tiles and bricks, broken glass everywhere. Hardly a building or house escaped damage in this area and although this only happened a few hours previously, I actually saw some women sweeping their steps free from rubble. So on to Liverpool Street, where I got a train home, time about 12.30 pm, very tired but thankful.

Now my story covers three days, two of which you know. Monday morning I was to be back to work early as possible and again I must remind my readers, my Depot also contained a Chapel of Rest for the dead, and workshops. Some of my fellow workmates were already working with the A.R.P. checking and cleaning for identification of the people, young and old, who had been killed in the bombing and taken to Plumstead Baths, Borough of Woolwich, in great numbers. It was part of my job to go around to the mortuaries collecting the unfortunate people for burial. This was not a very pleasant task for some of the sights were ghastly and this was only the beginning. I served in the 1914-18 war all through and saw a lot of my comrades killed and I do hope and pray that we never have to go through this hell again. I have had enough of war.

With kind thanks for this story to:'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'



Looking Back & Hope For The Future

Author unknown

I was born in 1932, so I was seven when the war started and I lived in Woolwich in South-East London. I kept thinking that it wasn't really going to happen but then it did. We lived on the main road, right opposite a place that made munitions - Woolwich Arsenal - which was targeted by a lot by the bombers. I could never understand why our house was still standing and to this day it still seems amazing that it wasn't hit.

I remember being evacuated for short periods to Swansea, to Bedford, to Letchworth, but I didn't like that at all, even though I wasn't always alone. Sometimes I'd have older or younger members of the family with me. But I was a Londoner and I missed the place and, of course, the rest of my family.

Seeing the Anderson shelter in the BBC's wartime garden, here at Hampton Court, brings back lots of memories. We had one in our garden but we never used it because it wasn't as safe as going into a proper shelter, and there were quite a few of them around - the big public ones that were underneath town halls and places like that. The other thing that I didn't like was going to Chislehurst Caves, although they were supposed to be very safe. They were huge with lots and lots of bunks, and it seemed a bit like a city when you went in. They were quite a long way from Woolwich but we knew people who had their 'set-up' there and sometimes they used to invite us to go along with them. The caves were cold, with water dripping, and were horrible, but people actually moved in to them and virtually lived there during the war. Really, we weathered most of the war where we lived in London, opposite Woolwich Arsenal. Bombs were dropped all around us almost every day but a surprising number of houses in the area survived. I still wonder how that was possible.

I remember watching the flying bombs or doodlebugs, and waiting for the noise to stop. If that happened when the doodlebug was anywhere near, a quick dash for safety had to be made because when the noise stopped, the bomb's journey was over and it was on its way down. When we were in the shelters we could hear the doodlebugs and we would sit there listening for the silence, and then wondering where they had come down, what damage had been done and how many casualties there were.

I don't remember ever feeling deprived during the war - you just got on with what you had. I think that we were all fairly healthy during the war because the food wasn't adulterated.

I still have links with the school I went to, because I teach for Adult Education. There were shelters under the school and we used to have to go in there when the sirens went off. I think they are probably sealed off now but I did wonder if I would want to go in them if they were still there. I decided I didn't want to! But they did provide a sense of security.

I lived quite near a place called Eltham which was quite a bit geographically higher than the surrounding areas, so you can see for a long distance from there. One vivid memory is of being there on a beautiful hot summer's day in September when there was intensive bombing along the Thames around 1.30 or 2 in the afternoon. I can remember looking at the awful devastation and feeling how strange it was that I was up there enjoying the glorious sunshine while not far away such a terrible thing had happened. Even as a child, it seemed

not a good balance.

I remember when I was 13, hearing that the war had ended. I was on a bus when someone announced it, and I thought, 'This is wonderful. There will now be peace and harmony in the world in the future. This is the start of something fantastic.' Everybody on the bus cheered and cheered, and the streets were full of excited and cheering people. I have good memories of VE Day when my parents and I managed to get close to Buckingham Palace. That was special! The then Queen wore something blue with a plume in her hat, and all those on the balcony were giving the royal wave. But what was best of all, was the warmth and enthusiasm of all the people around, many of whom were climbing up the lamp-posts to see better. It really felt as if peace would be in the world for always.

There were street parties to celebrate the end of the war, and again the atmosphere was so tremendous, it seemed as if this was the path to the future, everyone was going to love each other, and there would be no more fighting. I got that somewhat wrong! But I still believe in harmony - like the Chinese Yin and Yang concept - and when something not so good happens, I do try and find some good in it.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar.

Lost In The Fog

Leading Aircraft Woman Mary Elizabeth Frost (nee Geddis) - WAAF

I had been posted from RAF Kidbrooke to another camp near Woolwich along with a Welsh girl called Peggy Polston. We had missed our train on the way back and had to walk from Blackheath to the camp and got lost in the very thick fog. We had been walking around in circles and then met up with two soldiers who took us up to the camp gates. They wouldn't come near the gate and just left us to make our own way to the gate. There wasn't any camp guard on duty and we had to climb over the gate to get in. I shouldn't have been in the camp at all as I had been posted, but since it was such a foggy night, Peggy said that there would be a spare bed as some of the girls were away and I could lie on their bed. I did get a bed, but I was frightened as the huts were inspected every morning, so I pretended to be asleep and wasn't disturbed. The next hurdle was how to get out of the camp without a pass, but a group of us all walked together the other girls held up passes and I had a piece of card and got away with it.

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Lost Toys

Joan Denyer

My name is Joan Denyer and I was born in November 1941, therefore I do not have many memories of the Second World War, but there is one thing I remember clearly and that was when we were bombed out.

It was in July (I am not sure of the year), the reason I know it was July was that my dad was on his weeks annual holiday from Woolwich Arsenal and it was about 6.30 to 7am. My mum, dad, grandmother and I were in the Anderson Shelter when a Doodle Bug came down with its engines still on, a couple of streets away from us, we lived in Sandbach Place, Plumstead, London; our house was reduced to a shell and all our home was gone. The thing I can remember so clearly was amongst all the rubble was a tin bath with soft toys in, (who collected them up I don't know), I was so pleased to see them, but I couldn't have them because they were covered in glass - I was broken hearted and cried my eyes out that I had lost all my toys.

Although we had lost our home, we were very lucky, because if it had not been the Arsenal holiday week my dad would have been in the house getting ready for work and would have been killed, in fact, thinking about it we could have all been there.

One funny thing my mum told me was as they opened the Shelter Door to see the devastation my grandmother said to mum "Is my hair alright?" my mum replied, "Bugger, your hair, I have just lost my home." (mum wasn't one for swearing but I think she had just cause that day.)

Mum told me we had to live in the Shelter for a week, before friends found us rooms, there was no gas or electric, but it was a roof over our head and after a few weeks and much hassle we managed to get the gas put in (the gas company wanted us to pay for the installation as they said the house could be bombed and they couldn't get their money back, but mum stood her ground and the gas company paid for the installation). I can remember it being a very dark and cold place.

Toys were very hard to come by during the war, but somebody who dad worked with made soft toys and he made me a teddy bear who was much loved and was with me for years; unfortunately he was attacked by moths and eventually had so many holes he had to go to Teddy Bear Heaven!! I inherited my cousins china dolls when she had grown to big for them. One was called Wendy and the other Janice, (poor Janice, before I inherited, she had a lump knocked out of her head, which luckily didn't break, and was duly stuck back.) It wasn't until I was about 8 or 9 that I had a new doll of my own and I still have her today, she is sitting on top of the chest of drawers while I type this.

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Lyn Davidson, nee Sales, Remembers

My family have long been connected to Plumstead.

Both my father and mother were born in Sladedale Road. My father, William Sales, at No 93 and my mother, Joan Fuller, at No 28. They married in 1943 and lived with my nan at No 93 where I, Lynda Sales, was born in 1947.

The Sales family lived at No 93 Sladedale from 1912 until the 1960´s. (My grandparents, Rose and Richard with children Barbara, Rose Len and Bill.)

Charlie Sales was my mum's (Joan) brother and I have attached Charlie's obituary from Erith and Belvedere Football Club, which pretty much tells of his football career.

Charlie playing a joke on my mum as she was obviously unaware of him about to tip water on her head while she was posing for the camera; this was taken during the war years in the garden of No 28 Sladedale.

The other photo is of Charlie and brother Tommy in the Cup Final.

(The photo was signed to my granddad Charlie Fuller, known as 'Sonny', from the boxer Freddie Mills.) That was a very proud day for him to see his two sons holding The F.A. Amateur Cup.

The Fuller family lived in Sladedale Road, first at No 14 then at No 28, from c.1900 till late 1960´s. (My great grandparents, Charlie, Rosette and their six children. Then my grandparents Charlie and Alice with children Charlie, Tommy, Joan, Dorothy and Pauline.) Pauline is the only one still alive aged 82. (2009)

Lynda and Brian Sales: Back garden of 162 Lakedale Road. Although we lived in Lakedale Road, we were allowed to enter into the Sladedale Road, Fancy dress competition, providing we didn't win a prize. Which I thought was a bit unfair as I thought my brother looked really good.

Brian and Lynda on Winn's Common 1955 with 162 Lakedale Road, 2nd from Sladedale Road, behind. Charlie Newton is in the top window next door.

I have traced the Fuller family in Plumstead from 1863, with my two great grandparents John and Elizabeth, who had 13 children. So Plumstead was populated with quite a few Fullers down the years.

Coronation 1953. This was taken at the bottom end of Sladedale Road. I am the first on the left and have a sign around my neck to say I was 'Little Mo' the tennis player - in case it wasn't recognised just who I was suppose to be! The only other girl I remember was the 'Bride' third on left, Pat Ribbon.

We moved to 162 Lakedale Road after Ravine Grove and lived there until 1960, when we moved out of the area.

Timbercroft School 1958/59.
These are the names as I remember them. Top Row: L–R. ?, Eden Dorban, ?, Edward Hart, Michael, Diana, Doreen.
Middle Row: Mr Monk, ?, ?, Linda, Lynda Sales, Maureen Welsh, ?, Mary, ?, Stephen.
Bottom Row: ?, ?, Victor, Brian Morris, ?, Linda, Linda, Janet Balley, Ann.

Cowboy Joe, brother Brian in his cowboy suit.

The first recollections of my childhood I recall, was when I must have been about four or five years old and our family lived in Ravine Grove. Opposite was the Woodman Pub.

My brother Brian and I were friendly with the publican's daughter; I think her name was Shirley, and at the back of this pub was a café which was used by the bus drivers and conductors when on their break. I remember it being quite small with long benches and tables along the side walls and a counter at the far end. It always seemed hot and steamy from the cooking. The three of us went there regularly for our free dripping on toast. There was a hat stand in the corner and Brian, being mad on cowboys, couldn't be prised out of his cowboy suit and wore it constantly. On at least one occasion I recall the bus drivers throwing his cowboy hat on the hat stand out of his reach, which nearly brought him to tears until he remembered cowboys don't cry. But it was all good fun and was soon returned to him.

Me and my brother Brian, Ravine Grove c.1952.

Woodman pub on the corner with a bus waiting at the terminus and a jellied eel stall (?) on road.

Old Mrs Dicken's shop on the corner of Goldsmid and Sladedale Roads was regularly visited by me for my 1d. bar of Cadbury's chocolate. This particular day she gave me a beautiful jewellery box; it had a lid of inlaid mother of pearl and was full of broken jewellery. At this time (around 1956) there was a fad at Timbercroft School to collect coloured glass stones from costume jewellery. I had an old tobacco tin with my collection inside and every playtime the girls used to gather round to swap their stones. Where these stones came from is anyone's guess. But mine came from this box that Mrs Dickens gave me. I can remember prising the stones out of these pieces of broken jewellery to eagerly swap with my friends. Unfortunately, I no longer have the box, but I still have one piece of jewellery that I have kept to this day - a gold bracelet inset with mother of pearl and rubies. It was only years later I wondered just what I had swapped!!!

My brother Brain and I in the paddle pool, Winn's Common. This must have been taken about 1952.

This is something my mother (Joan Fuller) told me: When she was a child living at No 28 Sladeldale Road, they had a duck called Jack, which was very much looked upon as a family pet, until one day my granddad decided to have Jack for dinner. He was too much of a softy to kill it himself so sent Jack round to a man who lived round the corner in Roydene Road to do the deed for him. When all the family were seated round the table for their meal of duck and two veg, the children promptly burst into tears and refused to eat 'Jack'. Needless to say, my mum never ate duck after that day.

Memories From Timbercroft School

Trevor Cradduck

I was evacuated along with my mother to Martock in Somerset in 1940, for the duration of the war. We returned to No 47 Highmead after V-E Day and I started at Timbercroft School the following September in 1945.

While evacuated, I had the good fortune to attend a small one-room school with only about 20 pupils, from the age of four in early 1941, to nine in 1945, where I received an outstanding education. Unlike my class mates at Timbercroft School, whose education had been frequently interrupted by the air raids and were also taught in classes with large amounts of pupils, I was well ahead of them, with the consequent result that I was thoroughly bored when I resumed back at Tinbercroft in Mr Hersey's class.

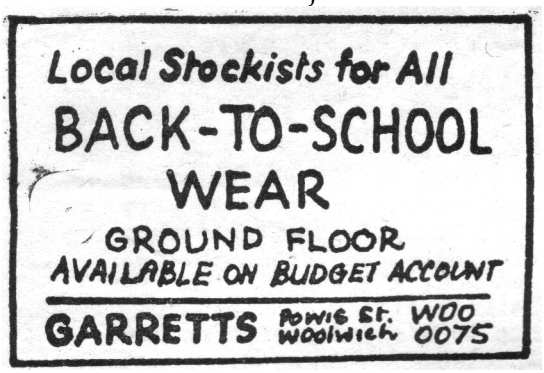
I do recall that when Christmas 1945 came along, we had some tangerines distributed to the school and Mr Hersey demonstrated how to peel it in one go, thereby avoiding a gross mess of peel in the classroom.

There was a greengrocers at the top of Highmead on Swingate Lane. One morning, word spread quickly among neighbours that a shipment of bananas had arrived. My mother made sure she was in the queue and was so delighted that she brought me a single banana, delivered to me in the playground before school started that morning. I had never seen a banana before and when it came to playtime, I could not figure out how to peel the darned thing. I imagine I eventually bit into the stem and managed to peel it, but my frustration managed to attract a small gathering of my classmates who were equally intrigued.

In early 1946, my mother noticed an advertisement on the front page of the weekly *Kentish Times* announcing pre-11 plus entrance exams for the Roan School for Boys (now the John Roan School). At first, she dismissed the idea of me taking any such exam because she figured there was no way they could afford the fees, but then she noticed the small print stating that fees were no longer payable at the Roan. Armed with this advertisement she went to see the Head at Timbercroft to seek permission for me to take the exam. He opinioed that he didn't see much hope but it might serve as good experience for the 11-plus, which I would have to take the next year anyway.

I passed the exam and joined 19 other boys in the pre-school at the Roan in September 1946, graduating from there with a Roan Scholarship in 1955.

My days at Timbercroft therefore were limited to just the one school year.



Memories Of A Plumstead Common Lad

Robert Bob (William) Green

Me, Robert Bob (William) Green, February 1949.

I was born in September of 1941 and, according to mum, in the middle of an air raid. The event took place at the British Hospital, Samuel Street, Woolwich.

We lived at my Grandparents house, at 68 Ennis Road.

In fact, my auntie and uncle also lived in the same house. Auntie Ciss, uncle Sid Runacres, on the bottom floor, nan and granddad Clegg on the Middle floor and last but not least, mum and dad Green and myself, Robin, on the top floor. Incidentally, "Robin" was a nickname, my proper names being Robert William. There is a reason for explaining this, as toward the end of the forties I had a great friend whose name was Rodney Morrison; he would have known me as Robin. Rodney lived in Admaston Road, just down from the bomb site at the end of Ennis. If you are out there, old buddy and you read this, I would love to hear from you. I will come back to this period of my life, after a brief excursion into the intervening years. 1941 to 1944.

Dad, brother Ricky, mum in background, and me Trafalgar Square, c.1950.

My dad was in the Royal Air Force and I did not meet him until I was five years old. This

was due in part, to the evacuation, coupled with the fact that all servicemen in those days were away for at least two years at a time, before getting home to their families, if they were lucky!

I became one of the evacuees and was shipped off, courtesy of the Southern Railway to Cornwall, complete with lapel label. Tintagel was my destination. The family I stayed with owned the local garage and were called Mr and Mrs Powell. As an aside, some years ago I went to visit them and was recognized almost immediately.

Now I have set the scene, we can come back to my return to London in 1944, almost fatally as it happened. I have some recollection of the events.

It was the night the 'Sun Laundry' was bombed and destroyed, in Upton Road. The air raid warning had gone off, mum and I were on the top floor at No 68. It meant getting down three flights of stairs and down into the air raid shelter as quickly as possible. We made it, as the incendiary bombs started to fall. I was pushed in first and knocked senseless, notwithstanding as mum fell in on top of me. We survived that, myself with a concussion.

My beloved granddad with my rabbit John and Nelly Dean the dog, 1949.

I made mention of incendiary bombs. My granddad had four of these as fireplace ornaments, defused of course, these were a constant source of my attention, but I was forbidden to touch them. Granddad had an allotment which we referred to as “the plot”. This was off to the right of Wrenkin Road, up on the highest spot where there was a great view of the docks, the River and the Fords factory over at Dagenham. The whole hill area was covered with plots; one I remember, next to granddads, was kept by Mr Pizzey The Royal Arsenal, together with the areas north of the River, or 'over the water' to us, was some of the targets for the 'Doodles' that came over from the coast and I often remember these things flying over. That dreadful sound, like a muffled motor bike, disappearing from view then the silence!!!! followed by the flash and then the explosion. The “Arsenal” again! granddad would say.

There were several bomb sites near us in Ennis Road. About half way between our house and Plumstead Common Road, almost opposite the junction with Macoma Road, is where I believe a Doodlebug came down. I can't be sure now, but there were probably four of five houses that were destroyed there. Prefabs were quickly erected on the site, although strangely, part of the bomb site was left derelict. The old church on the corner of Palmerston Crescent and Admaston Road was also a victim.

After the War, these were ready made play areas for growing lads, as well as on the Common. Saturday morning we would go down to Birds Nest Hollow for a 1/2p licorice stick and some sherbet on our way to the Globe cinema, or for an even greater escapade, a morning spent on the free ferry. To sponsor these trips and supplement my 6p pocket money, I was allowed to keep the returns on Tizer and lemonade bottles if I took them back to the pub. They were the glass bottles if you remember, with the flip over tops that sealed with a wire-cam devise. Speaking of which, another of my pocket money supplements was taking the 'accumulators' back. We used these to power the 'wireless', strange rectangular clear glass flasks that sat under the side board and gurgled and fizzed. On the subject of the wireless, can anyone recall the programmes we used to listen to? One in particular comes to mind. That of Radio Luxembourg, broadcast on 208 metres Medium wave, courtesy of the Glen Garry Biscuit Bakery, at 7:15pm, also..."Dan Dare, pilot of the future." It was only on for fifteen minutes, but for a small boy this was the adventure of the day.

These accumulators were far too heavy for a small lad to carry, so they were carted off to the shop on our home made carts and barrows. By the way, the reason for the accumulator was that we had no electricity, only gas. This was supplied via a gas meter. Oh yes, another digression, if the gas was allowed to get low enough for the light to go out, it would POP! This was guaranteed to blow a hole in the gas mantle and it needed to be changed, before the gas was turned on again.

For posterity, I will describe the mantle. When new, it was made from an open weave fabric, shaped like and bigger than an acorn. This was attached to a ceramic hoop with three prongs equally spaced around the top. To remove the old mantel, you had to wait for it to cool off. It was an extremely fragile thing, which usually disintegrated at the touch. The new mantel was negotiated over the nozzle on the gas light, pushed up and turned to engage the three prongs onto their notches. This done, you were in business; I hasten to add that this was all done with someone else holding a torch on the proceedings.

Going back to the cart, most of us had one, few bicycles for kids in those days. Constructed from any wooden crate, cadged off the grocer, some old pram wheels found on a bomb site, large ones at the back, small ones on the front, these attached to centrally swinging board the ends of which were threaded with a piece of rope to supplement your feet when negotiating bends. We had few toys compared with what kids have these days, perhaps some marbles, or a collection of cigarette packets or cards. The empty packets, were prized amongst the lads and swapping duplicates took a chunk out of your day. We used to raid the waste boxes on the bus platforms, normally meant for tickets,

Granddad's cats, Bill Bill front, our Simon, (not the Amethyst's cat) behind, 1949.

but you knew those would be in "good nick", compared to the ones we found on the pavement. The target buses were the 53s parked up over the Common.

Let me see now, there was '555 State express', 'Black Cat', 'Passing Clouds', 'Craven A', 'Navy cut' and many other brands. There was always the added bonus of finding a 'fag card'! Looking back, I think the attraction was what nowadays would be termed as the artwork. Our days were filled with make dos with what little we had. We were Happy!!!

During 1946 my mum told me my dad was COMING HOME To see us! Up until that time he was a photograph on the mantle piece and that's all I had to go by.

Our first meeting was just like the scene in the film The Railway Children, when Roberta (Jenny Agutter) met her screen dad off the train.

I was allowed to go to the Station, on my own! and told the porter I had come to meet my dad.

Captured, mum, in the backyard of 68 Ennis Road. My auntie Ciss on the left, nan on the right.

With most men in uniform, it was a bit bemusing to watch them all step off and rush to meet their families; remember I was only waist high, things can get a little over powering when you're only that big! The platform had all but cleared and I was beginning to wonder if my dad was in fact coming home, the guards whistle went and the steam started to clear; a figure carrying a kit bag on his shoulder appeared. For a moment, as if time had frozen we stood. "SON!" he said dropping his kit bag and picked me up. I had a dad like everyone else. I don't think I let him get a word in all the way back to the 'Ship' on the 53 bus. His time at home was all too short. It wasn't long before we were told, he had been seconded to the Dutch Royal Air Force and posted to Bircham Newton in Norfolk. This time we would be provided with quarters in Heacham New Row, where we would follow later.

Meanwhile, I had started school at St Margaret's, but, as with most service children, I didn't stay longer than my dads postings wherever he was. I also joined the 15th Woolwich St Mark's Scout troop. By mid 1948 mum and I were back in Plumstead, dad having been Posted to Aden. In September of that year our family of three became complete with the birth of my brother Ricky into this world. My auntie Ciss also gave birth to my cousin Judy around the same time. We remained at Ennis Road until 1950. During these returns to London, my granddad became my mentor, we went everywhere together. The Ship pub was one of his favourite haunts, together with his dog Raffey and me. Even in those days I had to sit outside but was allowed a stronger than usual shandy. My nan used to go bananas when we both rolled in smelling of beer! That included Raffey as well, as she always had her tipple on the bar. Granddad was a fabulous character and had been in the Royal Navy from 1901 to 1921. I believe he was quite well known locally as "Bill". He also "worked for the Council", as my grandmother phrased it. In fact he swept the roads and part of his patch was Herbert Road. My granddad won medals for his bravery during WW1 and I was all the more proud of him, when I eventually found out what he did for a job.

Uncle Sid and auntie Ciss Runacres wedding photo. Taken at Alexander Studios, Woolwich.

During April, in 1949, the *Amethyst* was attacked in the Yangtze River and with my granddad's background, he was glued to the wireless for all the news to come out of China. I also used to listen with him, if only to find out what had become of 'Simon' the ship's cat. My dad was still in Aden at the time and I remember how difficult it was for my mum to get me to sit down and write to him, however, when it came to getting my own way, I asked him if we could look after Simon when he came back to England.

As fate would have it, *Amethyst* called in to Aden on her way back to Devonport and my dad made the acquaintance of Lt Cmdr Kerans.

On her return to England, granddad took me to Devonport to see Simon. One of the ship's crew took me below decks to see him. In November, when Simon died, I was heartbroken, but, to this day, I have always been back to his grave at the PDSA Animal cemetery at Ilford. These events are separately recorded on a website called MaritimeQuest, together with my dear old granddad's pictures of his time in the Navy.

In early 1950 dad came back to England. The family was reunited and he was posted to North Wales. Apart from Christmas family reunions, I never returned to Ennis Road again.

I now live in the depths of Dorset, a far cry from Plumstead; my story is probably a little different from others of us from that time in history, but that 'little difference' resides in all our personal recollections. I recall those days with pleasure and would not change them for the world.

I shall go back one day, catch the 53 bus from Woolwich Arsenal Station and get off at the Ship, to walk once more up Ennis Road.

Memories Of The Blitz, Granada Cinema, Woolwich

from story, 'Childhood Memories In London And Kent' by Sheila Andrews

The next Saturday when mum and I were at "the pictures" (the Granada, which is close by Woolwich Ferry), we had our first taste of the Blitz. The floor was bouncing so much it made our feet dance even while we were sitting down in the seats. People started running for the walls, but we stayed put as I did not think it was a good idea to get mixed up in that panic. The lights were turned on and the usherettes came on stage to sing to us.....the horrors of war! When it quietened down, the film was resumed and when we came out after having had our full ninepenn'orth, a scene of devastation met our eyes. Broken glass everywhere being swept up: blazing barges full of coal had been towed out into the middle of the river to burn out and huge fires burning on the other bank of the river. The margarine factory burned for a week with a huge pall of black smoke.

After that there were daily raids. So there was no more novelty in bomb stories and they became the bore of the century. Little did I dream that in sixty years' time even the BBC would WANT to hear them.

I did not discover until after the war that the German plan was to put out of action all the airfields defending London, then get all the Civil Defence stations before they started on the bombing proper. They did well too, as they got nearly all of the schools in Woolwich, mine included.

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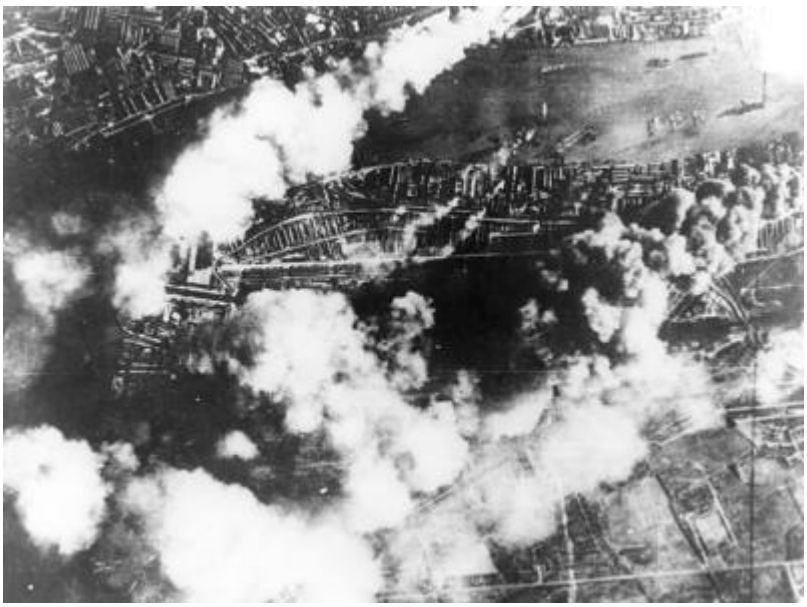

Aerial view of the smoke from the blitz during WWII over and around the docks and Thames.

Memories Of The War Years, Selling Relics

on behalf of Mrs P Flowers

I can remember during the war, we had one of the outside toilets in the old house and as I came out of the toilet walking down towards the window and saw the window crack from top to bottom. The next thing, there was a blast, and it was a doodlebug just up the road. As I rushed under the table, the ceiling came down and the windows came in, and my feet were covered in glass and blood. But I got a good hiding from my mother because I'd left the lid off the butter dish and the glass had come in on the two ounces ration of butter for the week. Forget about my feet!

I can still remember my old identity number as well, and I remember we used to have to go to school with tin helmets because we were near an ack-ack gun and of course we had the gun fire. And of course we all slept down in the shelters and sometimes they would be soaking wet, and at other times they would be dry. I remember there was a ritual though. We used to have to take down a black box with all the insurance policies, and a flask of water for the tea and coffee.

Then one day we had a Messerschmitt shot down near us, and we had the wing come down in our garden. One of my friends and his brother were cutting bits off this Messerschmitt and selling them to local children for sixpence as mementoes. I didn't keep any myself - I didn't like the smell of it. It smelt terrible!

It's lots of little things like that that I remember but I think it would take a life time to tell all of them!

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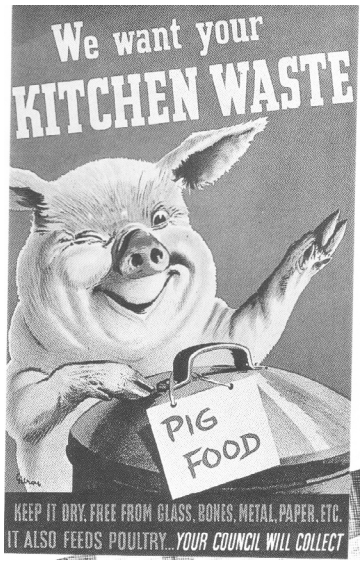


Memories Of VE Day In Frances Street, Woolwich

Pat and Tony Fawcett

VE Street Party in Frances Street, Woolwich May 1945.

Pat.

Preparations were being made in our street for a great street party and when the great day came, May 8th, we were ready. Some of the ladies had been collecting money towards the party and quite a sum was available. Pieces of old sheeting, always white in those days, were transformed by red and blue 'Dolly' dyes, hurriedly bought from Potter's the oil shop. These were then cut into zigzags and the resulting triangles were sewn in red, white and blue order, onto long tapes to be draped across the street. My mum and her sewing machine, worked away busily and I, and my sister Janet, were allowed to help too. Flags came out from nowhere and were proudly hung from every available point. Peace was really here!

In Frances Street, outside the 'Britannia' pub, just in front of the brick air raid shelter, a platform was erected, duly decorated in bunting. On this, loudspeakers were mounted and happy music filled the air. A few days later, more sheets were transformed into table cloths, draped on trestle tables borrowed from the school hall, and jellies, blancmanges, fairy cakes and sandwiches were proudly brought from every house. The 'Street Party' was on and we children were having the time of our lives.

We dressed up. My sister was wrapped in the versatile white sheet, as Britannia, with a

paper-mâché helmet. My cousin Marie was the Statue of Liberty, wearing a spiky paper headdress, and I was Russia. I had on my Auntie's bright yellow blouse, and black bolero, and a skirt made out of a Russian flag. We danced, we sang, we watched the huge bonfire with Hitler's effigy burning away, and we were ecstatically happy that the war was over — at least in Europe it was.

But somehow, there was something that was spoiling the happiness for me. Other people's sons, brothers, husbands and fathers would soon be coming home, but my dad would not. My dad had been in the Royal Navy, since he was a twelve year old boy sailor, at Greenwich Naval School and later on he had volunteered to serve in submarines. His fight for freedom had been fought under the sea, and he and his shipmates had paid the extreme sacrifice. Though, for a long time, I kept hoping and dreaming that he would come home, I knew I would never see him again.

Tony.

We lived in Frances Street, Woolwich, close to the Britannia public house, situated at the junction with Chapel Hill. In front of the pub was a brick built surface air raid shelter, with a reinforced concrete flat roof. My friend Basil lived in the 'Brit' and together we decided to build a gallows to hang an effigy of Hitler, the mastermind behind the deaths of so many. Timber beams from one of the many bombed sites provided the material, and old clothes stuffed, made our body. My father drew a fair likeness of Hitler, which we attached to the head. The gallows, complete with hangman's noose around Hitler's neck, was fixed at first floor level to the 'Brit' frontage, for all to see.

There it remained until the bonfire, which took place in the natural (triangular) square at the junction of Chapel Hill, Eustace Place, and Frances Street. With the gallows in the centre, a plentiful supply of wood was arranged around it. All over Britain, similar fires were to be lit, to celebrate the Nazi defeat. And what a bonfire that was! It lasted well into the small hours. All over London the sites, where fires had been lit on the roads, showed large areas of burned tarmac, but who cared?

That was the start of the celebrations. Each street in the area started with a tea party for the children. Trestle tables covered with sheets, with long benches each side, were placed in the centre of the road, the traffic being diverted. Goodies that must have been hoarded for months appeared. Sandwiches of all sorts, cakes, jellies, blancmanges — it could not have been from the black market, surely? The children had a fantastic party in the afternoon, but in the evening it was the turn for us older people — I was well over fifteen at the time!

The shelter in front of the 'Brit' became the backdrop of a stage made from scaffold poles and boards. With the piano from the pub, and a few other instruments, a 'band' was assembled to provide music to dance to. There was also an amplifier rigged up for anyone wishing to sing. There was one young girl, whose voice was similar to Vera Lynn's and she was in great demand at all the street parties, singing the favourites of that time. The pub did a roaring trade, as did the fish and chip shop opposite, staying open until quite late.

Happily for us youthful types, the parties did not all occur on the same day. All we had to do was to look to see which street was having a stage erected, then we knew when and where the next one was to be. The 'Hokey-Cokey', 'Knees Up Mother Brown', 'There'll always be an

England', they all remind me of those far off days when I knew we would not have to dive into the air raid shelter again.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

Mike Hume Family Story

Mike Hume

Aunt Amy, aged 77, Picture taken in May 2005.

Having retired as a Director of a PLC in June 2002, my wife Chris and I commenced researching my family history. Unbelievably in 2005 we managed to locate my mother's younger sister Amy, who was born in 1928 in Bristol, (my mother was born in 1905)

Prior to my retirement, I had virtually no knowledge of either my mother or my father's families, or from where they originated.

Aunt Amy was amazed to see me as she thought that I had also died with my family in 1944, and she managed to give us much information about the family and also had a precious picture of my mum with my older brother John Robert. I had no memory of my mum and believed that I would never know what she looked like.

A precious picture of my mother, Kate, known to the family as 'Queenie', holding my older brother John Robert, aged 11 months. Picture was taken on 21st Dec. 1932.

Sadly, aunt Amy has now developed Alzheimer's and her memory is deteriorating; it was a miracle that we found her when we did. We have managed to piece together many parts of the family history from census documents, birth, death and marriage certificates which have taken us to Scotland, Southern Ireland, New Jersey USA, and have now found many relatives in Queensland Australia, and British Columbia, Canada.

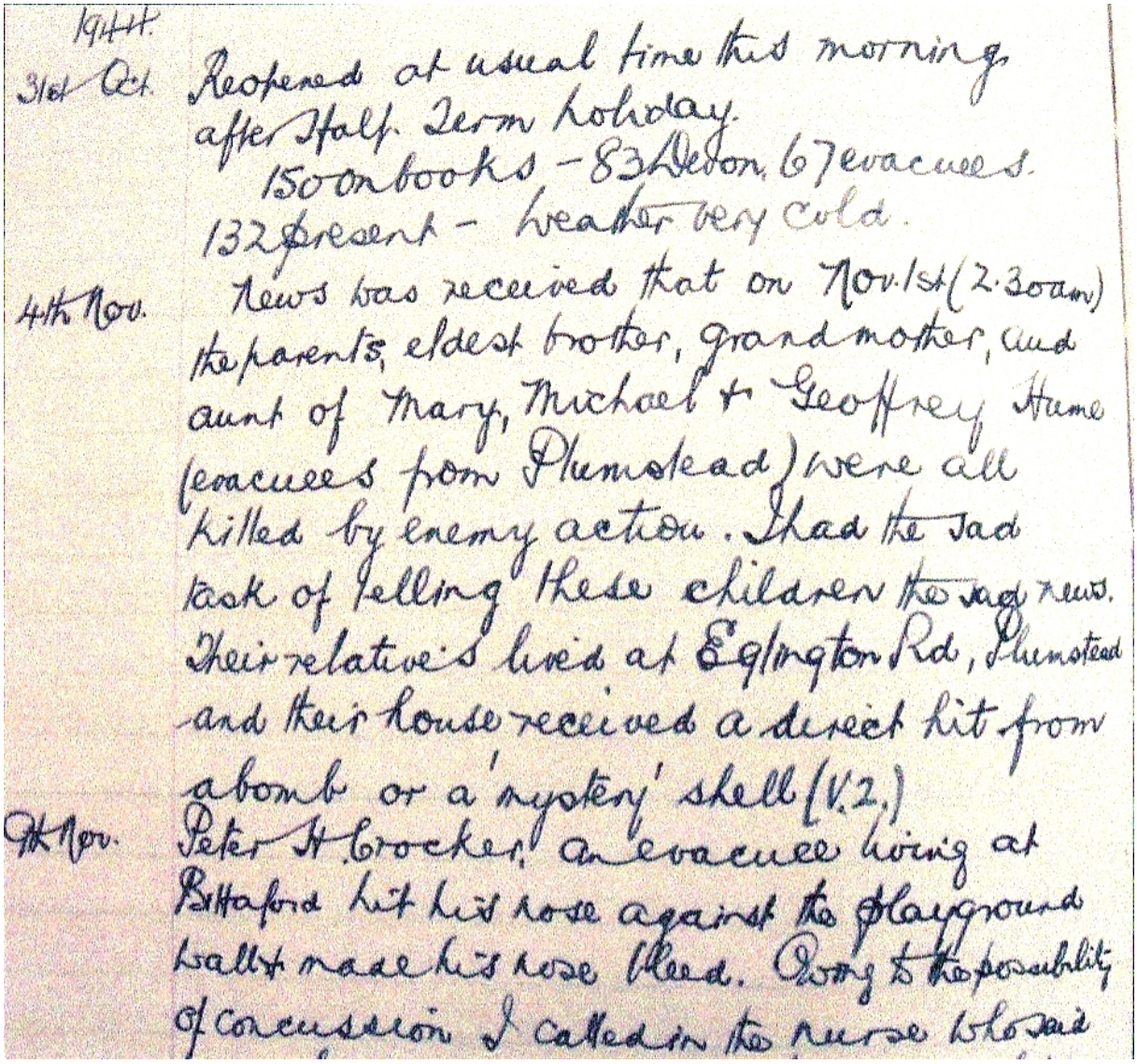
My story starts...

I was born on 6th June 1939 at the British hospital in Samual Street, Woolwich and at that time my family lived at 4 Brookhill Row, Plumstead. We later moved to 83 Barnfield Road, and then due to enemy bombing moved to 140 Eglinton Road, Plumstead. Together

with my older sister Mary and older brother Geoffrey, we were evacuated to a small village called Ugborough, South Devon, in the summer of 1944.

During my recent research into my family and their history, my wife Chris and I have discovered that it was a V2 rocket, not a V1, that made a direct hit on our house at 02.30 am on 1st Nov. 1944.

Sadly, my mother, father, grandmother, brother and aunt were all killed, and we learnt the awful truth from the headmaster of the school at Ugborough the following day. (We managed to obtain a copy of the headmasters log book from Ugborough primary school)



1944

31st Oct. Reopened at usual time this morning, after Half. Term holiday.
150 on books - 83 Devon, 67 evacuees.
132 present - weather very cold.

4th Nov. News was received that on Nov. 1st (2.30am) the parents, eldest brother, grandmother, and aunt of Mary, Michael & Geoffrey Hume (evacuees from Plumstead) were all killed by enemy action. I had the sad task of telling these children the sad news. Their relatives lived at Eglington Rd, Plumstead and their house received a direct hit from a bomb or a 'mystery' shell (V.2.)

4th Nov. Peter H. Crocker, an evacuee living at Bittaford hit his nose against the playground wall & made his nose bleed. Owing to the possibility of concussion I called in the nurse who said

This copy was taken from the School Register of Ugborough Infants school in South Devon where we were evacuated during the war. It is dated 4th Nov. 1944, following the death of my family on 1st Nov. The Headmaster was Mr. William George Beare.

After the war had finished we came back to live at 76 Vernham Road in Plumstead with an elderly aunt and uncle, not far from our family home at 140 Eglinton Road, Plumstead. But owing to the trauma of the death of my parents, most of my young childhood memories had

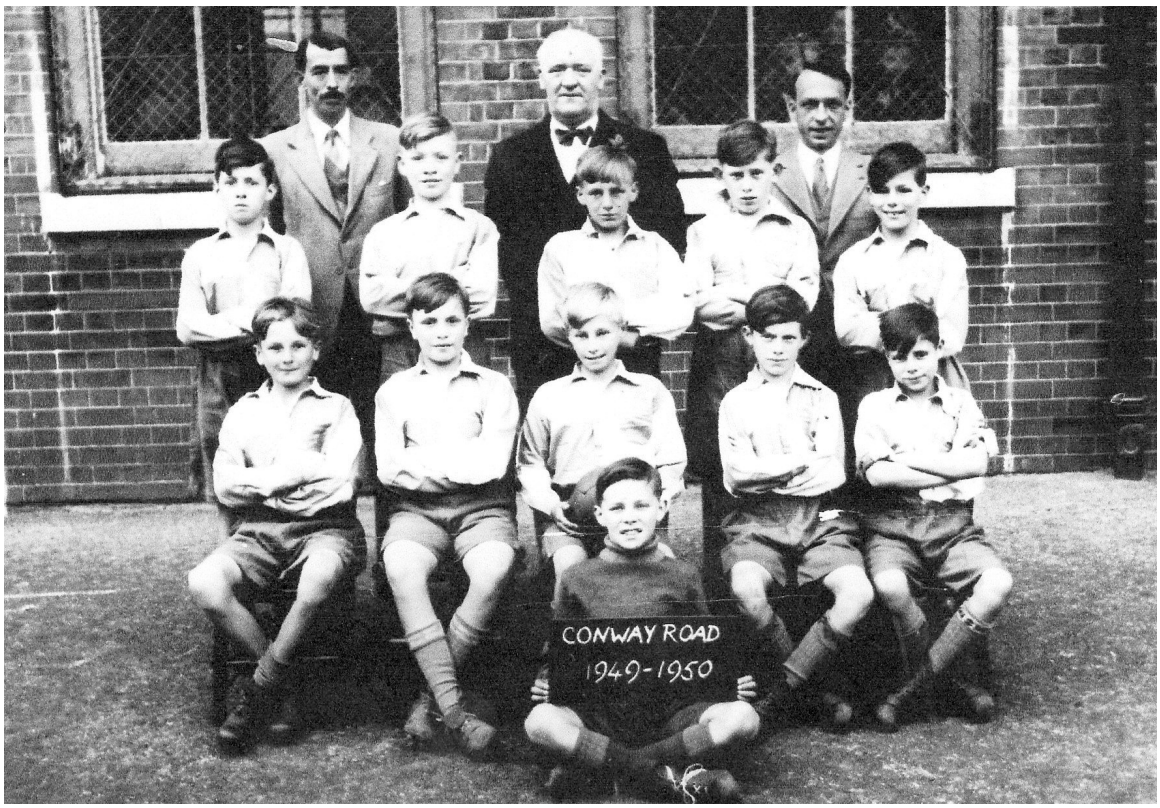
been erased, and it has been only recently that our research has identified the history and background of my family, which we have now documented fully. The elderly aunt & uncle we lived with were regular church goers to The Peoples Hall, The Slade, and we attended services and Sunday school as well.

Aunt and Uncle who we lived with after the war. Left to right, Uncle, Aunt Aggie, Mary aged 15, Geoffrey aged 10, Michael aged 8, in 1947, in the back yard of 67 Vernham Road, Plumstead.

On returning to Plumstead in May 1944 from Dartington Hall, in Devon which is where my brother and I were sent to after the death of our family, I attended Plum Lane Primary School which was just a short distance from 76 Vernham Road.

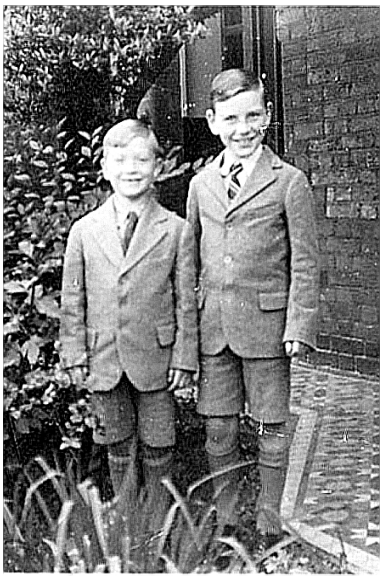
In Sept. 1946 I went to Conway Road School until 1951 when, having passed the 11+ exam, I went to St Olave's and St Saviour's Grammar School at Bermondsy, London. Whilst at Conway Road School I played in the School Football Team 1950/51.

Conway Road Primary School. Mr Jenkins Class -1A- 1950. I am situated 3rd from the right second row from the back. Note all the Cub and Brownie uniforms there are being worn.



Conway Road, Football Team 1949-1950, I am situated 2nd from the left, middle row.
Rear Row, Mr. Lovatt, Mr Cyril Bull, Headmaster, Mr Mockeridge.

The Woolwich & Plumstead Fellowship Football Club, 1921-22. My father John Robert Hume is pictured 2nd from right in centre row, next to him on his right is his brother Frank.



Michael aged 7 and Geoffrey aged 9, in 1946 in front garden of 67 Vernham Road Plumstead.

My grandfather John Hume, having been demobbed from the Royal Artillery at the Woolwich Barracks in July 1888 , initially went to live at 29 Sandyhill Road prior to moving to 101 Barnfield Road. He worked at the Royal Arsenal as a Foundry labourer until he died in 1922.

On Holiday at Margate, 1946. L-R: uncle, Michael aged 7, Mary 14, aunt Aggie, Geoffrey 9, aunt Mitt.

Below: Michael 7, Mary 14, Geoffrey 9.
Michael, 8, dressed as Hiawatha for the school play at Plum Lane, sister Mary made the outfit, in 1947.

Geoffrey holding our pet cat 'Tiger' in 1947.

All at 67 Vernham Road.

have written the life histories of my mother, father, grandfather and grandmother, piecing together all the information we have obtained to date, although to this day I have only very sketchy memories of my father, and mother and no memories of my grandmother.

(2010)

Mike Marsh's Story

A brief precis of my time in Plumstead starts when I was born in St Nicholas Hospital two weeks before WW11 started. I lived with mum and dad and my grandmother on Plumstead Common. Dad was called up into the Army and in the Blitz we were bombed out and we were evacuated to Westerham in Kent. Here, I spent my early childhood, not far from Chartwell, the country home of Winston Churchill, who I saw on several occasions when he came home to there from London.

After the war, dad was demobbed after quite an active time overseas. As it was for a lot of wartime babies he was a stranger to me and to my younger brother Andrew when he came home in 1945. We eventually found ourselves in a brand new house on the Woodlands Estate, No 84 High Grove. That's when I met our mate Chris Kitchenham and we became best friends along with Val Carey, Ivor Bailey, and the King Family among others, who I'm sorry to say, I can't remember their names.

I attended Timbercroft School and played cricket for the school under a Mr Hersey, the sports master.

Timbercroft School, about 1950, I am extreme right in front row.

My sister Jeannie was born about this time. After Timbercroft I went to Bloomfield Secondary School. Chris went on to The Roan Grammar School. I did fairly well at Bloomfield and was good at art, so, when I left in 1955, I got a job as a sign-writer with the R.A.C.S. That is where I met the love of my life, Mavis Trew. At this time, I had lost touch with Chris as he had emigrated with his parents Jack and Masie to Canada.

I had always wanted to join the Police and in 1957, I joined the Metropolitan Police as a Cadet. I was made up to a full Constable in 1958. Mavis and I married in 1959 and we were

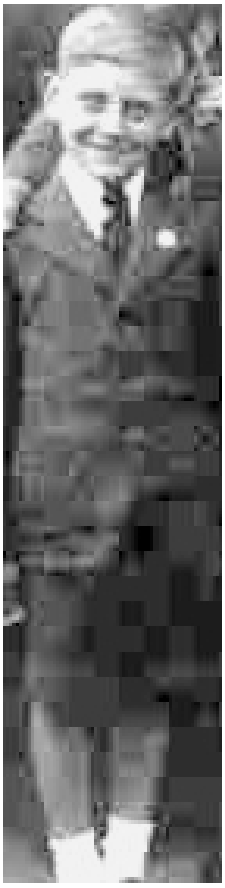
blessed with three children, Philip, Hayley and Samantha, who have given us six beautiful grandchildren between them.

Bloomfield School, around 1954, I am second left in back row.

I retired from the force in 1991 and became Head of Security at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. I fully retired in 2006 and am very involved in our local Baptist Church and enjoying travelling, the grandchildren and golf.

Mischievous Kids.

Derek Boswell



One time, a few of us kids were playing next to the common on a piece of waste ground, (probably a bomb site) by the junction of Flaxton Road and King's Highway, where a few old cars had been dumped. We were playing on one of them when someone thought that it would be a good idea to light a fire on the floor of one. I can't remember how we got this going but it very soon got out of hand. We retreated across to the common and watched as the flammable contents burned fiercely. Soon the flames were pretty big and, although there was never any danger to anybody or anything of value, someone evidently had called the fire brigade. An fire engine turned up and promptly extinguished the blaze. We were scared of being spotted and accused and so we bolted into the nearby Bowmans Hollow woods.

Derek in his good clothes and on his best behaviour.

On another occasion, just after the war, when some items had appeared in the shops, I and one or two others acquired a Milbro air pistol. I can remember these cost 17/- each and they were not very powerful. One time we got up to some mischief with this when we had crossed the railway line at Church Manorway and had walked down to the sewer bank road. This road was lined with gas lamps and we shot at the glass. Normally, there was insufficient power in the shot to do any damage, but this time a glass broke. We walked on and shortly afterwards we spotted the lamplighter coming along on his bike to light the lamps. So far as I recall it was not getting dark and maybe he was just early. However, when we saw him, we got over the low wire fence and into an area of long grass and Hawthorn bushes that lined this road, but he had seen us and he called out. We surreptitiously dropped the air pistols into the long grass before he reached us and then turned to face him. He ranted on quite a bit at us as he reckoned we had broken it with a stone. We denied all knowledge of the incident. He said that he had found it was alright earlier in the day. However, he could not prove it was us and went on his way. Retrieving our weapons we carried on to the bottom of Harrow Manorway, where we walked up to Abbey Wood.

One of my regular mates was Richard Dodd. He lived in the last house at the top of Southport Road, and was the most mischievous of us all: He had pinched one of the thick ropes from a Beasley's brewery drey used to lower the barrels into the pub cellars. He would carry this coiled over his head and shoulder . He was undoubtedly the best climber of all of us. One time we got through the railings around the ravine pond at the bottom of the hollow, and he scaled a large willow tree that overhung the pond; he went up this like a monkey and draped the rope over a high bough and we were able to swing out over the water. None of us fell into the water either! Great fun for little mischievious common kids.

Missing Person

on behalf of Marrion Cartwright

My family lived by the Woolwich Arsenal which was in Woolwich, and the nearest station was the Woolwich Dock Dale Station and I used to remember mum trying to get home and having to try and get shelter, with me as a babe, trying to get through the bombing with an elderly mother and a young baby.

I didn't see my dad till I was three and a half. I was six months old when he was reported missing and taken as a POW in Germany and I was three and a half when he came out. Of course, I didn't know him, I'd seen photos.

I can remember my mother telling me that I used to push my way in-between my mum and dad if they were holding hands because I didn't know who this man was. Also, it was an all female environment that I was brought up in, so, who was this man claiming to be my dad?

I can vaguely remember things like that, but people just didn't want to talk about it. My mum said that the war had changed his personality. He stayed in the army till forty-seven because he was a regular and a Sergeant Major, but left to become a postman (one uniform job to another).

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

Morgan's Shop Story, Swingate Lane

Dean Lucas

I'm 28 and was born and bred in Plumstead. I moved a few years ago to deepest darkest Kent but still have an affection for the Plumstead of old. I lived near Swingate Lane. What may be of more interest to you is some pictures that I have and some historical knowledge of one particular corner of Plumstead!

Morgan's shop in the 1950's.

As a nipper I was fascinated with a particular local sweet shop and as I grew older so my fascination grew. The shop in question was H Morgan, 2 Camdale Road, Plumstead. The shop was round the corner from me and was run by an elderly couple Mr & Mrs Morgan. As I got to know about them and I also got to know Mrs Morgan's sister, Ivy Allen. Ivy lived next door since her early 20s with the rest of her family. As I got older I started doing odd jobs, such as shopping for Ivy as, since Mr Morgan had died, she had moved to the shop to help her sister. After her sister died the shop was closed. So, once the shop was sold and then sadly demolished, she moved back to her bungalow.

Mr & Mrs Morgan in their back garden behind their shop c.1950's.

I became good friends with Ivy and from about 1997 I used to take her out shopping and on outings etc. I was a teenager and loved her company. She told me about her tales of the war years in Plumstead and about her unusual life; she never married or had kids and had owned her own shop in Plumstead at one point (the top of Burrage Road). Her father and mother kept a shop in Kingsdale Road (now a house) and suffice to say, there were many other tales as well.

By 2003 Ivy became increasingly frail, albeit very healthy though, and went into a home in Thamesmead. Of course, she missed home. I kept on visiting her regularly and she enjoyed the other company there too. Sadly in November last year she died; aged 95. Very suddenly and peacefully. She was buried in Woolwich Cemetery with the rest of her family.

What do I think of when I think of Plumstead? Well, you always have an affection for the place you grew up in, but what makes it more special for me is knowing how rich in history the place is and the backgrounds of many of the people and the places that touch your life. Thankfully, I got to learn much about these things that interested me, along with what touched the lives of these people that made this history.

The newsagents in Swingate Lane, run by Joan and Frank.
The photo shows Frank outside the shop on his 65th birthday in 1997 with a banner put together by customers. The picture is particularly poignant as not only is the shop now no longer (it is proposed to be redeveloped by the landlords), Frank died some three years later. As mentioned in my story, the shop was taken over in 2000 but significantly changed inside to a far more modern interior. I feel it quite sums up the kindness of Plumstead people and is a part of its history, having been a newsagents from 1938-2009. Photo by kind permission of Joan Lucas.

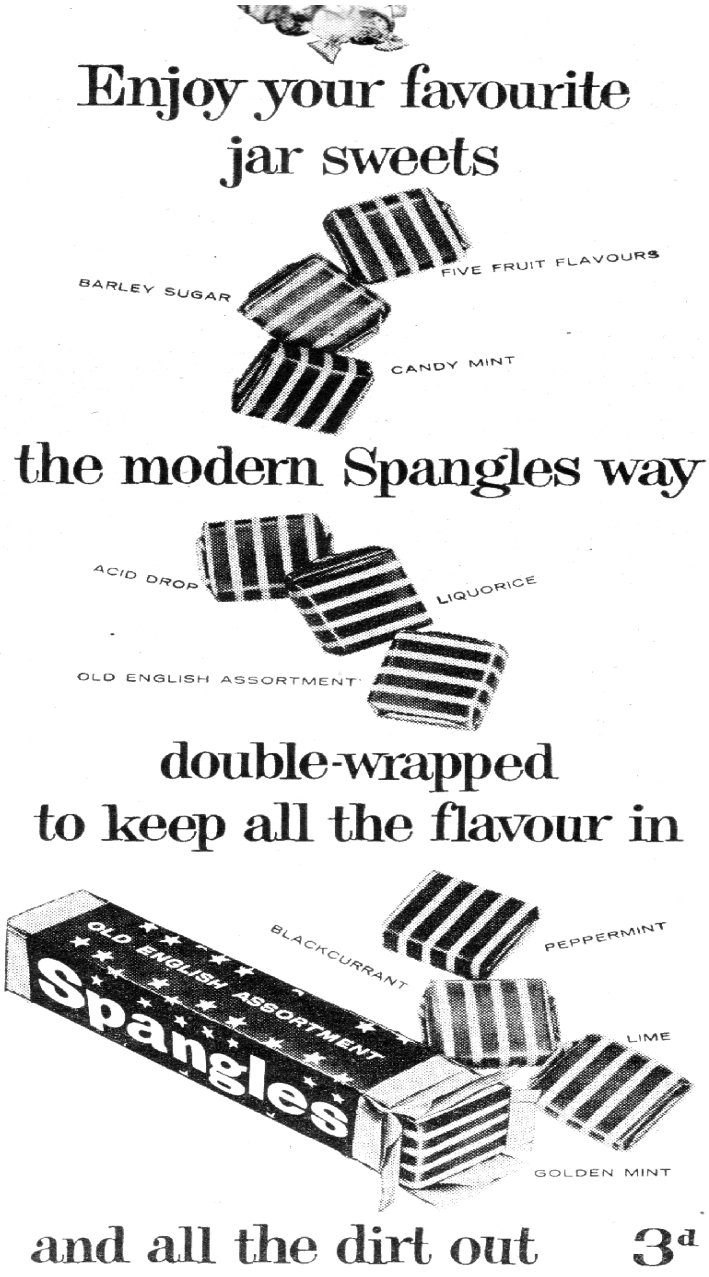
I was born in the Mother and Toddler's Hospital in Woolwich and spent my early years in the upper floor flat of the tower block in Conway Road. Later, when due for demolition, we moved to Edison Grove in Plumstead. Edison Road and much of Highmead consisted of identical houses, built, I believe, in 1937 and of such a good standard that the builder went bankrupt. Although only two or three bedroom they were very generous in size, with generous windows and a good sized garden. I watched, as a child, as one by one the wooden, leaded light windows were replaced with plastic windows, slowly the face of the road was changing.

Around the corner were a parade of shops. Upon moving to Edison in 1983 the parade, even then, consisted of all you could really need: a Post Office, Frank and Joan in the Newsagents & Sweet Shop, Fred in the butchers, the hair dressers, June in the Grocers, the Greengrocers, the off licence and the hardware shop. They closed without fail for lunch at one o'clock in those days and then sadly, closed forever over the years, until now only the newsagents (though not in it's previous form), the hairdresser and another off licence remain. The future of the existence of this parade also looks very bleak.

My fondest memories, naturally, were of the Newsagents and Sweet Shop. Most children have a memory of their favourite sweet shop, the one that had the biggest range and variety of sweets, where the owner had the time to spend with the children, even though they were only spending 5p. Joan and Frank ran Messengers, in Swingate Lane for 26 years. As I grew older, and myself working in a Newsagents in Welling, our relationship blossomed and certainly in the later years, when technology was being forced upon them, it was I who changed the ink cartridge and gave them advice on how to work their new bus pass machine (they had held on to their date stamping system for as long as they could).

I would spend many an hour almost every night chatting with Frank and I learnt so much. I learnt that the right range of the right goods was paramount and that old fashioned retailing was the most enjoyable. I learnt enough that I now own two of my own sweet shops; enough

that it inspires me to recreate the atmosphere and style that Frank so passionately created in his shop. He loved sweets and I can remember him getting so excited when a new sweet came in. Theirs was the only shop I knew that sold sweets from such a huge range of jars and Frank would never sell anything pre-packed and almost everything was sold from behind the counter. The till was akin to that of Arkwright's in Open All Hours and so were Frank's opening hours. Many a dark, cold winter's evening was cheered up when, from afar, you could see the shop glowing in the dark and that you knew a warm welcome would await you along with the day's shopkeeping tales.



Mother's Anguish

Belvedere, Kent

As a very young child I lived near Woolwich Arsenal and so was evacuated. By the end of the war we were back home and as a five year old I was at St Augustine' infant school. One day at school an air-raid warning siren sent us scurrying to the large brick built shelter in the playground. A bomb went off nearby but we were not hurt. The school windows all fell in due to the blast. The mothers soon arrived in a state of great agitation. We were amazed that they were crying as we were quite safe. They used the shelter for storing PE equipment later on and I always hated being sent to fetch anything despite the electric light.

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Motorbikes And AMC Works Plumstead

Bill Cakebread

I was born in New Cross in the war torn London of 1941 and educated at Wilson's Grammar School, Camberwell. I left school with dismal qualifications and had only one burning ambition-to work with motorcycles. AMC at Woolwich was the only major manufacturer in the south of England and it was to them that I made my hopeful application. Despite my unimpressive academic qualifications, my enthusiasm must have shown through because they offered me an apprenticeship. This was more than I could have dreamed of and I started work with them in September 1958. If my expectations had been high, the reality of working there was even better and, apart from a few stressful incidents initially as I adjusted to the long hard working days (8.00am to 6.00pm or 7.00am to 7.00pm with overtime) and factory life in general, I loved every minute of it. My schoolboy's dream to work with new motorcycles had come true. The starting pay was £1.95 per week. Some called it slave labour but to me it was worth it. During my time there, I worked in every department but received my most significant training in the Tool Room before joining the staff of the Design Drawing Office.

Road testers coming and going from the main gate near the lift entrance in on"Maxey Road.

For its time, the factory was very well equipped with mostly quite modern machine tools but

the departments themselves, spread over four floors plus a 'roof shop', were gloomy and, being separated by wire cages in many instances, almost prison-like in some areas. The quality standards were very high. The machining standards were such that we were able to manufacture gearbox internals for Ford and the inspection was to aircraft quality standards. The quality of the stove enamelling and plating were beyond reproach and the engineering of the bikes was something to be proud of. My abiding memory of all departments though, was the smell of cutting oil!

The Assembly Shop. *Photos: Bill Cakebread.*

Unlike the gloomy surroundings, however, the working atmosphere was very different. The Company was staffed by motorcycle enthusiasts at every level and this dedication to the end product welded together a genial family of workers. I have often questioned whether this feeling is based on pure nostalgia but it is not; it was unique and was shared by us all. I have never experienced anything similar in another company. Much credit for this atmosphere must surely be due to the three Collier brothers, motorcycle racers themselves and sons of the founder, the last of whom (Charlie) had only passed away a few years before I joined them.

Probably the most joyous place to work, for me at least, was the race shop where the beautiful AJS 7R and Matchless G50 racers were prepared for their lucky customers. I

enjoyed the meticulous care of their construction, compared with the pressures of the assembly line. No matter which department you worked in however, jokers abounded everywhere. Even the most senior members of management were sometimes involved, like the day that Hugh Viney famously accepted a bet and rode a trials bike up the main staircase to all four floors of the factory! In the assembly shop for instance, the gangways were clearly marked with painted lines. One senior tester was fanatical about tidiness and if any tool was to be left outside the lines, he would kick it away as violently as possible when he passed. One day, a cardboard box was deliberately placed in the gangway containing a heavy steel weight from a fly-press. The result was painful!

Rather oddly I thought, the bikes were assembled on the second floor of the factory and brought down in a large lift. They were assembled on a manually operated track which terminated near the lift shaft. Every single bike was individually road tested irrespective of the weather and the testers were hardy and highly respected motorcyclists. If any faults were found, they would be returned by the same lift for rectification in an adjacent department on the same floor.

Apprentices enjoying a break on the roof. Bikes that could not be finished were sometimes stored on the roof. (note the missing petrol caps!)
The writer is second from left.

On completion of my apprenticeship, I joined the Design Office staff before being appointed as assistant to Chief Engineer Charles Udall and Chief Designer Horace Watson to draw the P10, an 800/850cc DOHC twin that never reached production.

My Father had worked for his company (Merryweather's at Greenwich) for the whole of his working life and I had planned to do the same. Sadly, however, it was not to be and by 1966 it was obvious that there was to be no long term future for us. I handed in my notice and the official receivers were appointed a few months later. The last bikes eventually trickled out of the factory in 1969. The dream was over but the enthusiasm lives on.

The junction of Plumstead and Maxey Roads today. The small plaque on the wall to the right is all that remains to mark the site where this great motorcycle manufacturing company once stood.

Photo: Bill Cakebread.

It was to express my thanks for the training that I had received at AMC that I wrote my book *'Motorcycle Apprentice-Matchless in name and reputation'* (ISBN 978-1-845841-79-9) which it most surely was!

Editor's addition;

In regards to Bill Cakebread's story, I have some additional photos and comments from Derek Crompton who attended the unvailing of the wall plaque on the 9th September 2007.

Close up of the plaque. *Photo: Derek Crompton.*

Incidentally, Derek, who took this photo, said.."Just come home (Sunday) after watching them unveil the wall plaque to the Maxey Road AMC works. If the plaque is still there in the morning (if the wall is still there that is!). I'll take a picture of it." Next day.."Looks like I was not quick enough. Should of taken it yesterday!" A few weeks later..."The plaque has returned. (note the bolts.)"

AMC, the Woolwich/Plumstead-based motorcycle manufacturer built classic British motorcycles until the Plumstead Road factory closed in 1967. As AMC was in its time one of the world's largest motorcycle manufacturers, AMC was a major employer in South East London.

Photo: Derek Crompton.

Above and below photos: Now … and then!

You can just see the lighter mark, on the diagonal wall, where the plaque was originally put.

The Arsenal wall can be seen over the four lane Plumstead Road, where the van is heading into Woolwich. This would have been on the original pavement area, as it used to be pre 1970's.

Photo: Bill Cakebread.

My Best Mate Peter Barrett. 1938-1955

Mark Weightman

Peter Barrett was my best mate. We met at Wickham Lane School, Wack'am College. Peter was a good looking bloke and the attention he received from the girls made him aware of the fact and also from others, especially from some older fellows who were jealous of his popularity; unfortunately, who, on two occasions, when Peter and I were enjoying ourselves out on the town, were singled out by them. I was left alone by them but Peter was head-butted by these much older yobs who were in their 20s, we were only around 15. To this day, I still have a strong sense of guilt that I did nothing to help my mate during these attacks that happened so quickly. Poor Peter gathered himself together after these attacks, warning me not to mention the incidents to his mum and dad. Peter was the apple of their eyes. He was born late in their lives and no doubt a big surprise to them when he was born about ten years after his sister Joyce. Peter Barrett loved life and was a thoroughly good kid. At Wickham Lane School Peter was made Head Prefect.

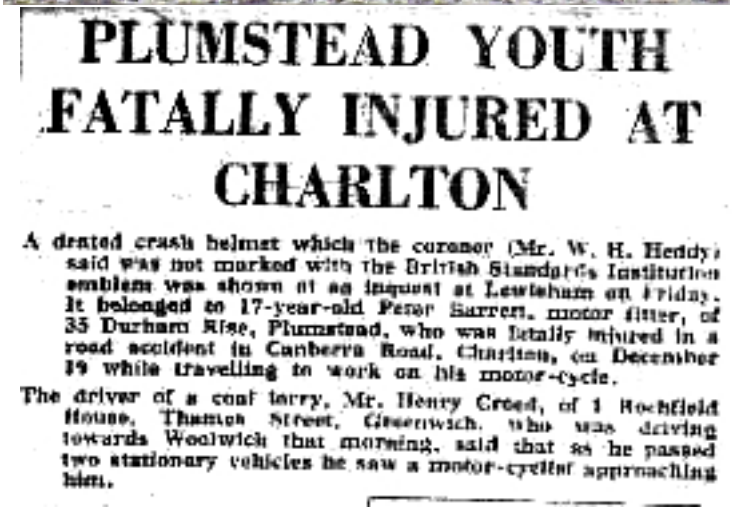
Peter with girlfriend Brenda at Brighton.

We went everywhere together and Peter introduced me to all his relations over the water in Poplar and in Essex. We thought nothing of cycling to Southend-on-Sea from Plumstead to visit the Kursal and to call in on my aunt Win and uncle Jack and also my great uncle Len in Lea-on-Sea. Peter and I enjoyed trips to Petticoat Lane and Club Row. Once, we returned from the Lane with a clear plastic magnifying screen which fitted over the existing TV Screen (it had webbing straps to secure it to the TV). Mr and Mrs Barrett had asked Peter to buy this screen magnifier which, when fitted to the TV screen, was then filled with water to gain

magnification. I remember their TV was an Alba, a very nice console model finished in highly polished wood. But, like most early television sets in those days, it had a very small 9"screen. With this magnifier installed, it supposedly helped to enlarge the image on the screen, but if one were to sit to the left or to the right of the set Macdonald Hobley or Sylvia Peters (BBC announcers of those days) they looked Japanese! Peter once played a prank on his mum and dad. He put a stickleback fish in the water of the magnifier. When they were both watching the TV later on, Mr Barrett said, "'ere Lill, what's that!!" Realising the joke Fred Barrett said, "it's that bleedin Peter what's dun'it" Peter was a great leveller. He would say to me "What do you think of my mum and dad Mark? aint they shocking" Yes, they doted on their boy, kissing him whenever we'd leave to go out from their home in Durham Rise.

Tragically, Peter Barrett died on December the 19th 1955, aged 17 years whilst riding his motorcycle to his place of work in the Old Kent Road. It was very foggy and ice was on the roads. His poor mother kept his body for three weeks in their home before his burial. I was at Peter's internment, but I had to keep a distance away when he was lowered into his grave, at Lodge Hill cemetery in Welling. I just could not observe close-up my best mate being buried. Peter Barrett's death was a much talked of happening. I have always remembered the 19th of December every year since.

Peter's Grave at Lodge Hill cemetery in Welling.



PLUMSTEAD YOUTH FATALLY INJURED AT CHARLTON

A dented crash helmet which the coroner (Mr. W. H. Hendy) said was not marked with the British Standards Institution emblem was shown at an inquest at Lewisham on Friday. It belonged to 17-year-old Peter Barrett, motor fitter, of 35 Durham Rise, Plumstead, who was fatally injured in a road accident in Canberra Road, Charlton, on December 19 while travelling to work on his motor-cycle.

The driver of a coal lorry, Mr. Henry Creed, of 1 Rochfield House, Thamon Street, Greenwich, who was driving towards Woolwich that morning, said that as he passed two stationary vehicles he saw a motor-cyclist approaching him.

Part of a newspaper clipping reporting Peter's fatal accident.

My Common

Christopher Martyn

To this day I remain profoundly grateful for a childhood spent in and around the wide open spaces of Plumstead Common, later, when I went to the Roan School, I got to know and enjoy Blackheath too. For a Londoner this was an exceptionally 'green' upbringing. The paths which criss-crossed Plumstead Common was where I rode trike and bike and went roller-skating. 'The slope' right opposite our house in St John's Terrace, was a downhill stretch that I rarely attempted. I was never keen to launch myself unrestrained *down* anything (e.g. playground slides) or *over* anything (e.g. most of the equipment in the school gym). This failure of nerve gave my PE teacher dad, Alec Martyn, no pleasure to contemplate. I was an equally reluctant swimmer, again something dad could not understand as a trophy-winning water-polo player. To think about visits to Plumstead Baths, even from this safe distance in time, still makes me feel queasy.

St Margaret's C of E School football team of 1955-56.
Standing L to R: Mr Tom Callard, Brian McCarthy, Victor Crooks, John Stanley, Christopher Martyn, Barry Dormer, Raymond Winchester, John Webster, David Collins, Mr Bernard Van Eyck.
Seated L to R: David Cuffley, James Laden, Brian Semple, Alan Manley, Keith Britter, Neil Stevens, Terry Levett.

The Common was where we played football, with our jumpers for goal-posts. Despite being a teacher - at Charlton Secondary School - and dealing with other people's children all day, dad was often willing to come out and referee our impromptu games. He would spend hours with me kicking a ball about or getting in a bit of cricket practice. What a saint. I didn't totally disappoint him, as I played in goal for the school team in my last year at St

Margaret's. We wore shirts with dark blue and light blue quarters, and the goalie sported a white, high-necked, thick woollen jersey. Home fixtures were played on Winn's Common, the largest flat expanse of Plumstead Common, which also had a panoramic view of the Thames less than a mile away. I used to think it was called 'Winds' Common; it always seemed blowier there than anywhere else. I have recently revisited this scene of our teams' few triumphs and many disasters. The pavilion has gone, though the foundations remain, and the pitches are still marked out much as they were in 1955-56. The goal-posts are now permanent and made from tubular steel, but in our day they were temporary and made of wood. We had to lug them – two cross-bars and four uprights - from storage racks by the pavilion and then erect them *in situ* before we could play. There were about 140 prefabs next to the games pitches, demolished in 1957, so there is now a lot more grass to play on. In the book **Our Common Story: a Celebration of Plumstead Common* there is a map on page 48 showing the position of these temporary post-war dwellings and their proximity to the area's only feature of archaeological interest, a Bronze Age barrow or burial mound, which the authors of the book claim as proof that people were living on or near the Common 4,000 years ago.

Winn's Common was also where I remember going to see local Scout troops try out their racing 'cars' before the big event in the grounds of Goldie Leigh Hospital, the annual Soap Box Derby. The vehicles were a sophisticated development of the traditional trolley, which was simply a plank of wood and four pram wheels with a short length of clothes-line to steer it by. The Scouts' cars used cycle technology with pedals and a chain; they will have been the fruit of hours and hours spent in back yards and sheds by grease monkeys and budding engineers. A paint job plus a distinctive number completed the preparation. I would have given my eye-teeth to ride one of these soap-boxes, but maybe it was better that I didn't, given my aversion to rapid downhill travel and the nagging suspicion that they had no brakes!

There were plenty of places to explore and trees to climb on the Common. Hide-and-seek was popular because some parts of the land are hollowed out, former gravel pits, and full of useful cover in the form of gorse, hawthorn bushes and tall grass; even the insalubrious gents' lavatory behind the Globe cinema off Blendon Terrace provided a good hiding-place. Nearby there were other man-made landmarks, like the bandstand and the war memorial. On Remembrance Sunday, before I joined the Cubs, dad and I would go to the wreath-laying ceremony attended by soldiers and veterans of the Royal Artillery. Just before 11 o'clock there was silence, followed on the hour by the distant boom of guns from the parade-ground of the RA garrison on Woolwich Common. Once I had joined the 8th Woolwich (St Margaret's) I would be in church at that time for a parish Remembrance service that was also attended by Old Comrades from the First World War. One of their number, the same retired colonel each year it seemed, would stand bow-legged but erect at the chancel steps to read out the names of the 'fallen', from the 8th London Howitzer Brigade, Royal Field Artillery. Being posh and officer class, he called his regiment the 'Uh-tillery', and I imagine he said 'clorth' and 'orf' too, if he needed his batman to take the cloth off the table.

The photograph of the gentlemen was taken in 1946 or 1947 in front of the pavilion close by St John's Terrace. My granddad, William Henry Livett, is second left, middle row (or first left, if you think the man to his right is really in the back row!) Anyway, he's the fairly tall distinguished-looking guy. I believe these were members of the Plumstead Common Bowls Club, but I'm not absolutely sure.

The part of the Common which we thought of as 'ours' was the area immediately adjacent to St John's Terrace. My granddad played bowls during the summer months on the greens virtually opposite our house. My dad and my godfather, Vic Mann, very occasionally played tennis on the nearby hard courts; and I loved to hone my putting skills on the nine-hole

green, which originally was at the top of our road, but later re-located to the other side, overlooked by the houses in Heavitree Road. I had my first encounter with stinging nettles in the fenced off area behind St Margaret's church, just where Bramblebury Road led onto the common. We all wore short trousers in those days - rarely in 'longs' before the age of twelve – and so my legs were stung to kingdom come. How the hot tears flowed as I ran back home. Never was an incautious trespasser more appropriately punished!

Just beyond the eastern edge of Plumstead Common, across King's Highway, was Rockliffe Gardens. I loved going there, perhaps the destination of a Sunday afternoon walk with dad. It was on several levels because it was built on the side of a steep embankment, and each level was connected by crazy-paving paths and steps. I dearly wished we could have a garden like this at home; our back yard was minuscule and utterly featureless. On the top level there were ornamental flower-beds, a rectangular fish-pond with water lilies, and a sequence of rose arches leading to a summerhouse. Down below there was a weeping willow tree standing sentinel beside a more rustic kind of pond. When, as a student, I worked one summer holiday for Woolwich Borough Council Parks and Gardens, I was assigned to duties in Rockliffe Gardens, weeding, cutting off tree suckers and mowing the narrow strips of lawn. It was the best job they gave me in six weeks or more. Only one public garden, in my view, could surpass Rockliffe, and that was the Well Hall Pleasaunce with its Tudor Barn smelling of old wood and wax polish, its enchanting mix of borders, low hedges, walls, paths and archways.

At weekends we would watch cricket games on the pitch in front of the Brown School (Then King's Warren, now Plumstead Manor) as a succession of 53, 163 and 180 buses came and went from their Warwick Terrace terminus nearby; the crews walking to a café on the corner of Old Mill Road for refreshment. There were always bowls matches to watch as well. Even now I can hear the plonking sound of wood on wood, and see the players run a few steps down the lane before stopping and shielding their eyes as they look into the late evening sun to find out how near the jack they get. Several days a week during the summer months my granddad walked up from his home near the bottom of Ancona Road, to our house where his 'woods' were kept. Once he was in his eighties he found the slog up the hill increasingly difficult, but then a 'godsend' as he called it. London Transport introduced the 192 bus route from General Gordon Square to Garland Road via Griffin Road and Waverley Crescent. I am sure that service extended his playing days by several years.

At the top of our road was The Lodge, traditionally the Park Keeper's house. Adjacent to it was the original stable yard, which by the 1950s, was used *inter alia* as a depot for the tractor we saw working every day on the Common, pulling the three-piece gang mower or a trailer full of tree and hedge prunings or whatever, according to the season. The L.C.C. Common Keepers (or 'Commers' as we called them) wore brown tweed suits. They were like policemen in some ways. Each one had a unique number punched in the oval metal badge that was stitched to the front of his brown felt hat. We were generally scared of them or at least wary, because they seemed determined to keep us under the thumb, chasing us off this patch of grass or reprimanding us about that imagined transgression. Adults in authority were like that in those days: always telling you off, threatening to report you, stopping you having fun. The Lodge is a handsome-looking house (see *Our Common Story*, page 28) with

its white-painted upper storey and rich reddish-brown brick, so unlike the soft, grubby yellow brick that our house was built of, in common with hundreds of thousands of others in London.

Plumstead Common was and is London's best kept secret. In sixty years I have met few people who have heard of it, let alone know where it is. I suppose if you had stood at a bus stop in Regent Street in say, 1960, and saw a 53 approaching with 'Plumstead Common' displayed on its front, you might have wondered where that was. But then I hadn't a clue about Wanstead Flats or Dollis Hill. North of the Thames is another country. I am just so glad to have had a share in that best-kept secret.

**This book, published in 2004 by the Plumstead Common Environment Group, is a treasure-house of personal recollections and illustrations which no self-respecting 'Commoner' should be without.*

My Dad

Linda Vranch (Mrs) nee Ott

My dad, Ronald Leslie Ott, was born in Woolwich SE18 on the 14th July in 1930. He lived in Ordnance Road. He told me many wonderful stories about war torn Woolwich. His father was a regular army man who, when he left the army, worked for many years at the Arsenal.

During WW2 he was injured, manning a street anti aircraft gun unit, and spent many months in hospital. Sadly, the local postman died along side him that same night. Dad's brother was shot down and killed over France in 1943 at the age of 19.

Dad tells of the night he ran up Shooter's Hill and, as he stood there looking, everywhere around him London seemed to be burning.

He adored the military and spent many hours watching the troops drilling and also listening to the military bands on the common and at the Academy. He spent sometime with the military horse vet as a boy, whilst inspecting the horses. There were many tales of scraps during his boyhood – a real insight into the poverty back then, but also into the tight community spirit of that time.

He told me of the days he worked with the dray horses for the Co-op and how he used to take them across the river on the Woolwich Ferry.

Sadly dad died on 29 October 2009. He was a wonderful man full of great stories and very much loved. His passing has left a huge gap, but I am so proud and glad I got to hear some of his stories.

My Father John Robert Hume 1898-1944

Michael Hume

My father was born on the 6th December, 1898 at the family home, 101 Barnfield Road, Plumstead, S E London. His mother, my grandmother, was Mary Hume nee Gorey. She was born in Pleberstown, Thomastown, in the County of Kilkenny Southern Ireland on 4th January, 1858, and his father, was John Hume who came from Melrose in Roxburgh, Scotland, and was born on 22nd July 1851.

My grandparents were married at St John's Parish Church in Kilkenny on 8th Feb. 1881, while my grandfather was stationed there with his regiment in the Royal Artillery. Grandfather was aged 29 years and grandmother was aged 24 years.

At the time of my father's birth, my grandfather had been demobbed from the Army some ten years, My father's family at that time consisted of six sisters and one brother. Agnes was the eldest sister, aged 15 years, Margaret 12 years, brother William Thomas 10 years, sister Mary Ellen 8 years, Kate Elizabeth 6 years, and Isabella 4 years, and his youngest sister Annie Louisa was fifteen months old. Sadly, another sister Mary, died when she was 6 years old 30th Dec. 1887, a brother John Thomas, died just over a year old, only a few months before his sister Margaret was born, on 27th Oct. 1886.

The family house at 101 Barnfield Road, Plumstead, was a modest two up two down terraced property, and space must have been very limited. My grandfather had worked at The Royal Arsenal as a Foundry labourer since he was demobbed from the Army in July 1888. Financially the family must have struggled hard to make ends meet.

On Sunday 8th Jan. 1899, my father was baptised at All Saints Parish Church, in Herbert Road, which was within a short walking distance from the family home.

On January 22nd 1901, Queen Victoria died.

On Sat.15th March 1902, my grandmother gave birth to a son, Charles Wallace at home.

He was baptised at All Saints Parish Church on 23rd April, but sadly died later that year on the 10th Nov. The cause of death was as Bronchitis.

On June 12th 1903, my fathers cousin, William Hume, married his bride Helen Walker, at Bathgate, West Lothian, Scotland. William was 23 years and Helen 19 years.

On Sat. 28th Nov. 1903, my grandmother gave birth to a son, Frank Hume at home. He was christened at All Saints Parish Church 5th Jan. 1904. This was her last child, she was aged 46 years when Frank was born.

In May 1910, King Edward V11 died, and in 1911, on June 22ndthe Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary took place.

In August 1914, England was at war with Germany,

On Christmas day 1914, My father's sister Kate Elizabeth aged 22 years, married Herbert George Surridge, 25 years, at All Saints Parish Church, Plumstead

On Wed. 3rd March, 1915, my father enlisted in the Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery, aged just 16 yrs 3 months. His Army No.971379. He was attached to 3 Section, 60th Divisional

Ammunition Column (DAC) and his rank was that of Gunner. His Army record shows that he stated his DOB as 6th Dec, 1896, when it should have been 1898. At this time the age limit to enlist in the Army was a minimum of 18 years.

Dad, centre row on the far right, probably taken just after he joined the Royal Horse & Field Artillery in March 1915. A few months after this his Battalion, the 60th Divisional Ammunition Column, were posted to Previn Capelle, France.

On 30th Sept. 1915, his brother William Thomas aged 27, married Ethel May Farracee, 25 years, at St. Mark's Parish Church, Victoria Docks, West Ham. His sisters Agnes and Isabella signed the marriage certificate as witnesses.

On 18th Oct. 1915, a son, Gordon Herbert, was born to Kate and Herbert Surridge,, at 163 Belsize Road, Hampstead, the grandparents first grandson.

On 24th June 1916, my father's Regiment, 60th Divisional Ammunition Column RFA, left Bryton Camp in Wiltshire, to travel to France. In Dec. the Battalion moved to Salonica where they stayed until May 1917. During 1916, 400,000 British troops were killed in the first battle of the Somme.

On 31st May 1917, a daughter, Marjorie Constance, was born to Kate and Herbert Surridge.

From June1917, to July 1919, my father was serving overseas in Egypt, and was awarded the British War Medal, European Campaign, and the Victory Medal.

On July 13th, 1917, my father's uncle, Thomas Hume, died aged 63 at his home in Galashiels, Scotland.

On the 11th Nov 1918, Armistice Day was declared.

On 4th August 1919, my father was demobbed from the Army; he was aged 20 years. 8 months. On 9th Feb. 1921, my father's sister Margaret died from Meningitis, at the London County mental Hospital Dartford. She was aged 34 years and was buried at Woolwich Cemetery.

On February 22nd, 1921, my father's cousin, William, son of Thomas Hume, died at his home

in Bathgate, Linlithgow, aged 41 years.

My father and his brother Frank played football for the Woolwich and Plumstead Fellowship Football Club. Dad was 23 and Frank aged 18.

On 6th April 1922, my grandfather died aged 71 years. My grandfather's previous occupation was listed as a Royal Arsenal labourer, and that he was also an Army pensioner. His body was borne to his grave at Woolwich Cemetery, from 101 Barnfield Road, on a Royal Field Artillery gun carriage as a mark of respect for his long service with the Regiment.

April 20th, 1923, Ethel May Hume died at the Cottage Hospital Kidbrooke. She was married to William Thomas, for just eight years, and was 33 years old. They had lived at 90 Rochdale Road, Plumstead.

On 3rd May 1923, my father enlisted with the 2/3 Battalion Grenadier Guards at Whitehall. Army No. 2609048. His basic training was carried out at the Guards depot, Caterham, Surrey. His initial period of service of three years was later further extended to seven years. He was mainly stationed at Barrosa Barracks, Aldershot, and was trained and qualified as a Machine Gunner. His rank was Lance Corporal/ Acting Corporal.

Dad with a detachment of machine gunners, possibly taken during a training session. Dad was an acting Corporal and his regiment, the 2/3 Battalion Grenadier Guards was stationed at Aldershot. Picture was possibly taken circa 1928.

The Army record of my Dad identifies that he was six feet tall, with a fresh complexion, blue eyes and brown hair. It also states that he had a tattoo of a horse's head on his right forearm, probably he had this done during the First World War.

On 19th Jan. 1924, my dad's brother Frank aged 21, married Marie Violet Kemp aged 20, at All Saints Parish Church. Frank was living at home in Barnfield Road, and Marie was living

at No 55 Barnfield Road. He was a Butcher and worked at Smithfield Market in London as a meat cutter.

On May 17th 1924, a second daughter Brenda May was born to Kate and Herbert Surridge, at the British Hospital Samual Street, Woolwich. They lived at 76 Princes Road, and Herbert's occupation was a Canteen Steward at the Metropolitan Police.

In 1925 my father's uncle, Robert Hume died, aged 77, at Innerleithen in Peebles.

The General Strike was in 1926.

On 4th Jan. 1927, William Thomas, married Edith Agnes Sherbourne at the Woolwich Register Office. Both were aged 38 years. His address was 101 Barnfield Road, Plumstead.

On 20th Nov. 1928, David Scott Hume, son of grandfather's youngest brother William, married Isabella Jane Melrose, in Galashiels, Selkirk. David was 31, and Isabella 27.

My older sister Mary 23 Jan 1934 aged two.

On 2nd May 1930 my father was demobbed from the Grenadier Guards. He was aged 32.

On 31st August 1930, a son John Edward was born to William and Edith. He was born at home at 39 St Jame's Place, Plumstead.

On 3rd Nov 1930, my father married Kate Parslow, known to the family as 'Queenie', at the Woolwich Register Office. My father was 32 (although the marriage certificate states 34), and my mother was 25. My father's occupation was a Gas Stoker, and my mother was a Domestic Servant at 228 Blackfriars Road. Dad's home address was 101 Barnfield Road, Plumstead.

On Mon. 26th Jan. 1931 their first son John Robert Hume was born at 101 Barnfield Road. On Sunday 1st March, John Robert was christened at All Saints Parish Church. Plumstead.

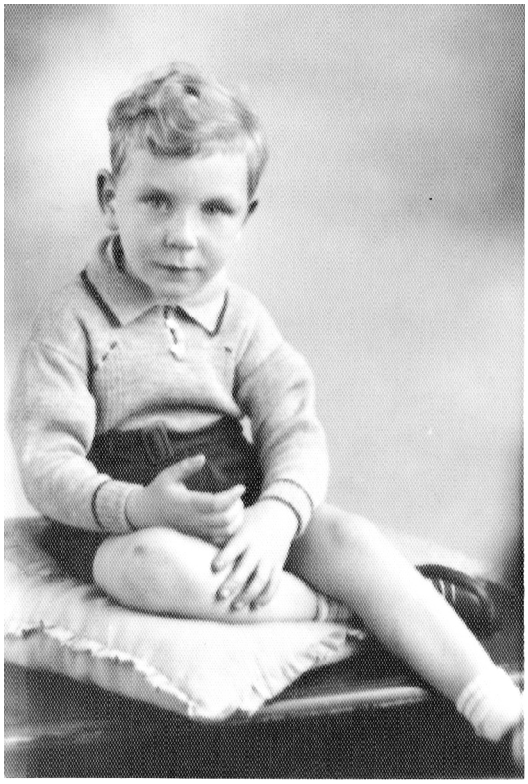
On 14th Nov 1932, their first daughter, Mary Agnes Isobel, was born at the British Hospital, Samuel Street, Woolwich. My mother registered the birth on 6th Dec. which was on my Dad's 34th birthday. The family home at this time was still with grandmother at 101 Barnfield Road.

On 21st March, 1933 Kate Elizabeth Surridge died from Pulmonary Tuberculosis. Herbert was present at the death. They lived at 4 Brookhill Row, Herbert Road, Kate was 40 years old. She was buried at Woolwich Cemetery. Just before Kate died, Marjorie and Brenda, went to live with aunt Agnes and her friend, Miss Miskin at 76 Flaxton Road, Plumstead. Miss Miskin was a Teacher at Ancona Road School. At times, Brenda was in Miss Miskin's class. Their brother Gordon went to live with his grandmother at 101 Barnfield Road.

On 11th Nov. 1934, my mother gave birth to a second son, David, at British Hospital, Samual Street, Woolwich. The lived at 4 Brookhill Row, Herbert Road. On Sun 13th Jan 1935, David was christened at All Saints Parish Church.

1936, December 11th, King Edward V111 Abdicated the Throne, and on Dec. 12th King George V1 Ascended the Throne.

On 20th March 1937, my mother gave birth to a third son, Geoffrey Allan Hume. He was born at the British Hospital, Samuel Street, Woolwich. Geoffrey was christened at All Saints Parish Church.



My older brother Geoffrey aged three and a half on 21st Sept. 1940.

On 2nd May 1937, a son Malcolm was born to Marie and Frank, at 64 Barnfield Road. Malcolm was christened on Sun. 30th May at All Saints Parish Church.

May 12th 1937, Coronation King George V1 and Queen Elizabeth.

On 6th June 1939, I was born at the British Hospital, Samuel Street, Woolwich. My family were now living at 83 Barnfield Road, Plumstead, Dad's occupation was an Electrician, 'Jointer's mate'.

On July 2nd 1939, there were two baptisms carried out at All Saints Church. My sister Mary and me. I was around one month old and Mary six and a half years old.

In 1939, Mary Hume nee Walker died, aged 80 , wife of William Hume (deceased), this was my fathers cousin who lived in Kelso, Roxburgh.

In Sept. 1939, England declared war on Germany.

Family group c.1939/40, back garden of 101 Barnfield Road, Plumstead. L to R, Brenda's father Herbert Surridge, aunt Isabella, grandmother Mary, aunt Ciss, aunt Aggie in front of Brenda, and Eileen Kennedy with Gordon behind her.

On 16th Dec.1939, Gordon Herbert Surridge 25, my father's nephew, married Eileen Nora Kennedy, 22, at St Michael and All Angels, Plumstead. They lived at 11 and 13 Congress Road, Abbey Wood.

Wedding of Gordon Surridge and Eileen Kennedy 16th Dec. 1939.

On 23rd March 1942, My fathers Sister Agnes Hume, aged 59 a spinster who had been living with her friend Miss Miskin, at 76 Flaxton Road, married Arthur Henry Wood 60 at The Peoples Hall, The Slade Plumstead. Auntie Agnes married on her birthday.

On 28th April, 1942, My father's nephew Gordon Herbert Surridge, aged 26, died in hospital at Rends, Denmark, as a result of wounds sustained in air operations. He was buried in Aabenraa cemetery, Denmark. His rank was Sergeant, and he was a Wireless operator/Air gunner in the RAF. Service No. 1376704, with No. 15 Squadron.

Wedding of Aunt Aggie and uncle Wood, at the Peoples Hall, The Slade, Plumstead on 23rd March 1942, on Aunt Aggies 59th birthday. L to R, aunt Ciss, uncle , aunt Aggie and aunt Mitt.

Gordon Surridge and his wife Eileen, c.1941.

The gravestone of Gordon Surridge, He was buried in Aabrenraa cemetery, Denmark.

On the 16th July, 1944, Mary, Geoffrey, and I were evacuated to a small village, called Ugborough in Devon, to escape the enemy bombing in London. This was under a Government evacuation programme called 'Rivulet', which was the final evacuation of 1944 for children to escape the Flying Bombs, the V1's and the V2 Rocket attacks' which were mainly targeting London. We were living at 140 Eglinton Road, Plumstead, together with grandmother Mary, having been bombed out of our previous address. In total there were 42 children evacuated in our party. One of my earliest childhood memories was waiting to board the train at Paddington Station, with Mary and Geoffrey, carrying a brown carrier bag with a gas mask slung over my shoulder and an identification label tied on my coat. I don't remember much about the journey down to Devon, apart from eating sandwiches and munching biscuits for our lunch on the train, but I do remember boarding a single decker bus, that took us from the railway station when we arrived, and dropped us off in Ugborough Village Square. The next thing I remember was waiting in the village church along with the other children, for someone to pick us out and take us to their home.

Early picture of the Ugborough village square.

Old picture of Fore Street, Ugborough, just off the Village square.
The cottage we lived in was on the left of the picture.

In the end, I think we were some of the last children to be taken care of. If I remember correctly, the reason nobody picked us out initially was because I wouldn't stop crying and was probably kicking up quite a fuss. After what seemed like an eternity we were finally picked out and went to stay with a Mr and Mrs Hine 'Winnie and Jack', they were an elderly

couple and were unable to cope with all three of us in their small terraced cottage in Fore Street (which just off the main village square), and so Mary went to stay with a Mrs Alice Heath in Donkey Lane, just opposite the church, only a short distance from us. We all attended Ugborough Village School during our stay.

I well remember that a German plane had crashed into the recreation field just opposite the village school one night, and the following day all of us children were scrambling over it, stripping silver foil from the wings and fuselage and breaking off pieces of Perspex from the windscreen.

Together with my brother Geoffrey, who was two years older than I, we spent a lot of time exploring the area around the village, and on one occasion came across Jack Hine, who we were staying with, working on a road repair gang, and I remember that there was a steamroller there too. He obviously worked for the local council repairing roads.

While we were at Ugborough, my father came to visit us once, by himself, and I remember him walking with me down a country lane, holding my hand. That is the only memory I can recall of my father, and it was the last time we ever saw each other. I also remember on one occasion gathering hob nuts from the hedgerows and as we were in the village during the harvest season we played in the haystacks during gloriously long hot sunny days. The local Blacksmith was a very kind man, a Mr George Trout, and I used to spend hours watching him shoeing horses, and talking to him. Often he would give us children small bars of chocolate, which would have been very difficult to come by during the war.

On Sat. 12th August 1944, my fathers sister Isabella, married, Herbert George Surridge, who had previously been married to one of his other sisters, Kate Elizabeth, prior to her death in March 1933. The wedding took place at the Register Office in Woolwich, Their lived at 2 Brookhill Road, Woolwich.

The whole area in SE London was being bombed very heavily, especially Plumstead and Woolwich, and the Woolwich Arsenal was a prime target. On 30th August 1944 the parish church of All Saint's was bombed, in Herbert Road, although miraculously, the church registers were recovered, which is how the details of my families Christenings and some marriages have been identified and recorded.

On 1st Nov.1944, at 2.30 am, a V2 rocket made a direct hit on our family house at 140 Eglinton Road, in Plumstead, My mother Kate, father John Robert, grandmother Mary, brother John Robert, and auntie Isabella, were all killed.

The awful news was told to us children at Ugborough by the Headmaster of Ugborough Primary School, a Mr William George Beare, and shortly after that Mary went to live with a family at Hope Cove in Kingsbridge, Devon. On 27th Nov. 1944, Geoffrey and I went to stay at Dartington Hall, in Devon. We probably left Ugborough as we were now classed as Orphans rather than Evacuees, and either the London County Council or the Local Devon, Totnes Council were now responsible for us.

A day or two after the V2 rocket struck our house, a Policeman called at the house of my grandparents, who lived in Bristol, to tell them the sad news. My grandmother Kate wanted to go to London straight away, but the policeman said that there was nothing left of the house or street, as the explosion had destroyed everything.

The Funeral for my Family took place at The Woolwich Cemetery on Monday 6th November, with a memorial Service at The Peoples Hall, The Slade, Plumstead. All the graves were unmarked.

My grandmother Mary, aged 81 in 1939.

An article in the local newspaper, covering the event, printed the following account of the funerals.

Five Raid Victims

On Monday last, November 6, in Woolwich Cemetery, were laid to rest, the bodies of Mary Hume; her fourth son, John Robert Hume; his wife Kate (Queenie); John, their eldest son, and Isabel Surridge (nee Hume), wife of GH Surridge, the victims of recent enemy action. The cortège left the home of her eldest daughter, Mrs Wood, 67 Vernham Road, Plumstead. The children from Plum Lane School formed a guard of honour in memory of their school chum John, aged 13 years. A number of other friends, unable to attend the cemetery, lined the pathway for several yards. The Rev Russell-Jones, pastor of The Peoples Hall, The Slade, conducted the service, first at 67 Vernham Road and then at Woolwich Cemetery, where the five bodies were taken into the chapel which was filled to it's utmost capacity.

After hearing a most sympathetic address by the Pastor, the cortège proceeded to the new section of the cemetery, where first they were laid to rest, Mrs Mary Hume in the grave of her late husband and daughter. Then, in a nearby new grave were laid Isabel Surridge, Kate, John Robert and their son John. The chief mourners were Agnes, William, Nellie, Cissie, Frank (sons and daughters); Mr Herbert Surridge (son-in-law); Marjorie and Brenda Surridge (grandchildren); Mrs W Hume; Mrs Frank Hume, Malcolm Hume (grandson); Mr Arthur Wood (son-in-law): Miss McPherson (friend), and a Mr Mills. Among others present were members of the Civil Defence, representatives from the Milling shop, Royal Arsenal; E 68A Canteen, Woolwich Arsenal: Messrs Siemens Bros Ltd., and many friends, to show their sympathy and to pay their respects.

Floral tributes were sent by Aggie and Arthur; Dan; Mary, David, Geoffrey and Michael (children), Willie, Edie and John; Nellie, Cissie and Margaret, Frank, Marie, Malcolm and Andy; Marjorie and Brenda; grandson John Edward; grandson Malcolm; Mrs M & E Miskin; Mr & Mrs Kennedy, Noreen and Eileen; supervisors and staff of E68A Canteen; fellow workmates in the Rolling mills and other branches of the Royal Arsenal; two wreaths from Siemens Brothers employees, Woolwich; children and staff of Plum Lane School; Mrs Barnett and family; Mr & Mrs West; Mr & Mrs Manning; Mr & Mrs Fowler; Gladys Reid and Iris Sanderson; Mrs Taylor and family; Mr & Mrs Wells; Mr and Mrs F Anderson; Mr & Mrs Gale; Mr and Mrs F Batley; Dorothy (John's school chum); friends at Barclay's Bank; staff of Shooters Hill Fire Station; E Whitehead (school chum): Mrs A Clark; Mrs. G Coton and Gordon Coton, Mrs Hatton; Grassely's (Woolwich Market); Mr & Mrs Barry and family; Mr & Mrs Edwards and Family; Mr & Mrs Belcher; Mr & Mrs Pepper: and others brought to the cemetery.

The family desire to thank all friends for floral tributes and letters of sympathy especially those expressed for the four remaining children evacuated. If any friends have been omitted from the floral list, the family ask them to please accept their apologies.

All communications should be addressed to Mr A H Wood of 67 Vernham Road, Plumstead.

In July 1985, having identified the unmarked graves, Chris and I organised two simple marble memorial headstones to be erected, in loving memory to our dear loved ones who so tragically lost their lives.

John Robert Hume born 6th Dec. 1898 Plumstead. Died 1st Nov 1944 Aged 46.
Kate Hume born 18th Jan 1905 Long Ashton, Somerset. Died 1st Nov 1944 Aged 39.
John Robert Hume born 26th Jan. 1931 Plumstead. Died 1st Nov 1944 Aged 13 years,
Isabella Surridge born 13th March 1894 Plumstead. Died 1st Nov 1944 Aged 50 .

My Life 1939-1945: Growing Up In Woolwich

Dave White 19/6/1930

In 1938, when Britain was on the brink of war with Germany, my mother decided to take my sister and me on evacuation. We were put in a car late at night and taken to some remote part of England. Bearing in mind that was the second time in my life that I had been in a car it was quite an experience. We arrived at this place that seemed like the middle of the night for me, as I was only eight years of age. We were ushered in and put to bed. When I woke up the next morning, what a shock I got. The toilet was at the bottom of the garden and the sink consisted of one large shallow sink with a cold tap. I must say that the house I came from was new and we had hot and cold running water, which was quite a contrast.

My mother approached the lady whose house we were staying at and asked her where we were; her reply according to my mother was "you're in England my dear" to which my mother replied "I know that but, where a bouts?" the lady replied that we were in Ogborn St. George in Wiltshire.

Needless to say, we went back to London the following week when we knew that there was going to be peace in our time. We never ever did leave London again and my mother chose to stick it out, live or die together she said.

As most of the schools in London were closed during the early days of the war, owing to lack of teachers, they had all gone with the evacuees. We never went to school for about eighteen months.

My sister who was twelve, did her best to teach us younger ones down the Anderson shelter.

In the early days it was quite exciting watching the dogfights, between the Spitfires and Messersmitts.

We used to spend our days going round picking up shrapnel, aircraft recognition etc.

I joined the 40th Woolwich Air Scouts where we did air spotting, paper collecting, metal collecting, anything to help the war effort.

When the Schools eventually opened, I went to a school in the next road in early 1941. My friend and I heard this plane come over, and then the siren blew, this was usual. The next minute a couple of bombs burst in our street, which we could see from the window. From where we watched, it looked as though both our houses had been hit; we tore out the classroom with the teacher screaming at us to go to the shelter.

We rushed home which took us about five minutes, to find that my friends house and the house next door were blown up. As the Germans only used small bombs, about 25lbs in their fighter-bombers, they didn't do that much damage at that time.

My friend's mother had gone to the top of the road to buy a loaf of bread only to find that her house had been blown up while she was gone. So she had a lucky escape.

My mother was at home but she was unhurt, thank God.

We lived one mile from Woolwich Arsenal, the armourments factory, so it was quite hectic most of the time.

One particular day, my father and I were digging out the Shelter to make it deeper; it was a beautiful summers day in September 1941. He said to me,"look at that big black cloud coming over", as the black cloud got nearer it started droning. We realised it was aircraft, I believe there were about 400 hundred bombers over London that day.

The docks were alight, Woolwich Arsenal was also alight. The heat from the Arsenal was so hot that the people who lived near by were forced to move out; they came up our road in hundreds. We took them in and gave them a bed for the night.

We spent many a long night in the Anderson Shelter, and then. went to school next day. Needless to say, none of us got very high marks in our Scholarship exam, now called the 11 plus.

I had a great big map of the Desert and I used to map out the 8th Army. One funny thing I remembered; every time the Germans retreated we called it a retreat, but when the Allies retreated, we called it a strategic withdrawal. Somebody near where we lived had their house blown down by a land mine. So he pinned on his front door that he had made a strategic withdrawal to somewhere else. What a spirit us Brits had, don't you think?.

We had round the area what were called A.W S. tanks; in other words, emergency water supply, in the case of the water mains getting bombed, the fire service could use these to put out fires. When we were kids we used to climb in these tanks and have a swim.

My father who was Mate of a tug on the river Thames, was moored outside Tilbury Dock. He was waiting to dock with barges into the dock, when up came a Naval officer, a three ringer to be exact. He told my father that the Navy had commandeered the tug and that he had to go ashore and get vitals and make their way to Chatham where they would receive further orders. They proceeded to Chatham where they spent the next 18 months ferrying supplies out to the airmen who were on barges out in the Thames estuary with a balloon barrage attached.

We never knew for three days that he had gone. Bearing in mind we never had any telephones in those days.

As the war progressed, we became more optimistic that we were winning, then came the Doodlebugs; in the main we didn't worry too much about them as you could see them coming, they were quite exciting really. Then came the V 2 rockets; we hated them because you didn't know anything about them until they struck, they were quite scary.

Then came V.E. Day, that was the greatest day of my life, we had tables out all the way up the street; there was singing and dancing everywhere; it was fantastic, but the down side was that I was a boy soprano at school, and that was it, my voice broke in one night.

That's the extent of my experiences.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

My Plumstead Childhood Days

Alan Edward Phipps

Like many Plumstead 'Commoners,' I made my (1933) entry into this world via the British Home for Mothers and Babies, but to a less than enthusiastic welcome from dear old mum, who insisted that this very ugly creature was nothing to do with her, and demanded a swap.

Fortunately, that plan fell through when it emerged that I was the only boy in that day's deliveries. The actual date was September 15th, which for some years later after WWII, celebrated my birthday with an RAF flypast, which was very flattering, but any celebrations of that kind must be shared with the 'Battle of Britain' commemoration, which I suppose, is only fair?

My birth year was not very auspicious for the world, as, in addition to being burdened with me, it was in the midst of the Great Depression, and a certain Austrian Corporal was calling the shots in the Reichstag.

Our family were living in the same house at 24 St Margaret's Terrace, from the late 1920's to the mid fifties, (now long since demolished) and had, in my father, someone who was very lucky to have held a steady job for all those years at the South Metropolitan Gas Co. in Greenwich, where the Millennium Dome /O2 Arena now stands. Having been invalided out of the Royal Navy in 1920, and reached the age of 48, he was not called up for military service in 1940. He did however become an ARP warden/fire fighter, so he must have spent many wearisome nights out amongst it all whilst mum and I snoozed in the Anderson shelter, where she was actually more perturbed by the AA gunfire than the bombers, (probably more so than the Luftwaffe crews, who usually managed to return to France, despite all the explosions and flashes).

Apparently, the idea of evacuation had been considered, but my father had the final say, and produced to support his rejection one of the weirdest statements of logic I've ever heard, even at the tender age of seven. This went, in effect, along the lines of, "If we are going to get killed, we'll all go together", which overlooked the fact that a typical day would find me at school, mum at home (in the shelter at night), teenage sister Joan, as an assistant in Cuff's department store in Powis Street, plus her ARP duties in the evening, brother Arthur on administrative duties as an RAF regular Sergeant, based in Hertfordshire and my father on various shift working "keeping the home fires burning". With the Atomic Bomb not being a reality for five more years, this made the chance of a clean sweep of our family pretty slim?

St Margaret's School, which mother managed to squeeze me into, well under age, was taken over by a Government department to assemble radios for military use (E.K. Coles Co., trading as EKCO Radios in peacetime).

Having no schools available nearby at the time, a handful of us used a neighbours front room for some tuition by a former teacher, until the main 'Blitz' was over, when we then transferred to Fox Hill School. Having passed what was then known as a Scholarship, I entered Shooters Hill Grammar School in Red Lion Lane, the location of which it was frequently referred to as. It's blazer and cap badge, a woven gold and green depiction of Henry VIII's warship 'Grace A Dieu` was a symbol that I was, with my future maritime

exploits, particularly proud of. The school was opened c.1931, and my late brother Arthur Henry Phipps was numbered in one of its earliest intakes, along with a better known youth from the catchment area, namely Frankie Howard, the comedian who went on to be so successful on radio, TV and film in postwar decades. We had a large panoramic photo in the entrance hall of the entire school, staff included and naturally the most readily sought out by visitors was not that of my brother but Francis, who had happened to mention the school in one of his radio programmes, and had then accepted our Headmaster's invitation to visit the classes of 1947/8. Within a month of my time there I was struck down by rheumatic fever, possibly as a result of the damp conditions in the Anderson shelter. This was in the summer of 1944, when we were under attack from the pilotless "flying bombs", also known as "doodle bugs", or "buzz bombs" but known to the Germans as a "V1" from Vergelten, meaning "retaliation". These weapons came as a complete surprise to the population of Southern England. When the first flights came, especially at night with flames driven from their ram jet engines, crashing to the ground in tremendous explosions, everyone was saying that "those gunners have got the hang of it at last !". It soon dawned on the 'powers that be' however, that shooting down a ton of explosive over London was helping the enemy more than us and so AA guns were moved, with commendable speed to coastal and rural sites, and had a significant effect when brought into action against these very low flying missiles, which the Germans had not fitted with any ability to zig-zag or to simply change course away from the firing AA guns.

We lads, like many featured elsewhere, did the same as just about every youngster in air battle areas, (as shown in the first half of that rather authentic film 'Hope And Glory') so that the moment the 'all clear' sounded, we were on our way to Plumstead Common to collect shrapnel fragments, some of it still warm to the touch. Most coveted were the fused nose caps from the 4.7"shells, and incendiary bombs which sometimes failed to ignite. Even my father used to bring a selection home from the gasworks fuel dumps because many items of ordnance did not explode in loose coal. I did have to point out that when the Luftwaffe realised how well the fire service and fire watches were dealing with these incendiaries, they included an anti-personnel charge to discourage handling!

One of the contributors in Volume 2 of '*Common Folk*' apparently found one of the carriers for these fire bombs, and we lads would have been several shades of green with envy at the news of a 'Molotov Chandelier' being found! This consisted of a metal tube, about 4-5 feet in length, set upright in a solid nose cone, and having three circular shelve fitted; the bombs being carefully stacked upright, but not secured, nose down. When filled, two curved aluminium panels formed the body up to the tail assembly, and secured with long vertical rods. The loaded device looked pretty much the same as a normal bomb and, complete with parachute, which when deployed, released the holding rods. Drifting downward, the swaying motion scattered the payload randomly over a large urban area, long after the aircraft had left.

Being in very close proximity to such genuine military targets as the Royal Docks and ship repair facilities, Royal Arsenal, AJS and Matchless motorcycle works, Gas & Electricity facilities as well as Ford's giant plant across the river at Dagenham, it was inevitable that many attacks would be made throughout the area. Having Ford as a 'near neighbour` was

handy in one respect, especially during the V1 assaults, as the factories had a ‘hot line` to advise when the doodlebugs were heading their way from the coast and, as a result, their klaxon could often be heard well before the local sirens.

Flying bombs were pretty regular visitors, despite 10% at most actually reaching London, thanks to the gunners and fighter pilots.

The biggest fright I ever got in my life was when, in our back yard, the ever growing roar of a V1 engine came closing in fast. Our road sloped down towards the Thames and, whilst giving us a grand view of the berthed ships in the Royal Docks, we could not see downriver, so the 'doodle bug' suddenly appeared over our rooftop just as the engine cut out abruptly (as they all did). There was no time to reach the Anderson shelter, so I dived behind a short run of fencing, so flimsy that next door’s cat could have pushed it over! As I lay there the wind could be heard whistling through the engine and disappeared, heading towards Charlton.

Previous mention from the earlier volumes was made of the V2 rocket strike at St Nicholas’ Church, not far from where my aunt and her family lived in Camrose Street, Lower Plumstead. The V2’s hitting the ground vertically at supersonic speed (causing a sonic boom on re-entering the atmosphere, followed by the rockets engine roar some seconds later after the explosion) created a narrow deep crater, throwing soil and debris high into the air, scattering it over a large area. The graveyard, dating back to the Victorian era, threw up many of it’s coffins and their contents, and revealed the activities of what were then known as ‘Resurrectionists`, otherwise more properly described as ‘Grave Robbers` who provided corpses for medical studies, etc. This was a profitable business, but unlawful and a risky practice. The solution was, whilst in the Undertaker’s ‘care`, to replace the dear departed with part of a large animal (typically horses or cattle), cut in half to provide a convincing weight for the coffin bearers…... Back to the V2 attack, and it was clear that the ‘cut` bones unearthed by its strike were not that of the human type, hence the swift removal of them from the site leaving just the genuine relics to be re-interred into a common grave.

With the assortment of offensive weaponry despatched our way, and seeing far more German than Allied aircraft, we received quite a range of hits within a one mile radius of our house. These included the Maxey Road Technical school, burnt out by firebombs, an assortment of H.E. and incendiaries and the ‘land mine` at Heavitree Road, where the drab green parachute remained wrapped around the sad remains of the blasted trees. Rockets also hit the Barnfield Road area and by far one of the flukiest shots of all, blew off one leaf of the Bascule Bridge over the entrance lock to the King George V dock in North Woolwich. To me, and my ‘ship spotting` mates, at war’s end, this was a gift from heaven, as the double decker buses had to be re-routed up the dock road, the full length of the KGV, and down the divide from the Albert dock, all the time enjoying an upper deck grandstand shipping panorama! The nearest incident to our house was the V1 strike which virtually wiped out Sandbach Place and dislodged a few of our roof slates, brought down some ceilings, blew in all the rear windows and blew the cloth cover from the canary’s cage. Poor Joey looked very sorry for himself, blackened by coal fire soot blown down the chimney but remained miraculously unharmed from the glass fragments that now covered the bottom of his cage!

We did not see much of the earlier 'Battle Of Britain`, which, sensibly took place mainly over rural Kent, Essex and the Thames Estuary, so most of the audible and visual action was distant gunfire and twisting vapour trails. One casualty nearby regrettably, was a downed Spitfire, which hit the ground off Plumstead Common Road with such force that the engine and forward fuselage were completely buried, and may still be there today? The scattered pieces lay around, none being larger than a dinner plate, and all that was found of the unfortunate pilot was one flying boot, complete with foot. This incident took place adjacent to the surgery of our local G.P., a Dr Coleman, actually Cohen, an indication that anti-Semitism was not confined to Continental Europe.

Having survived the war years, along with my immediate family, I left school in May 1949 and joined the Prince of Wales Sea Training School at Ingham, in Norfolk, for six months and started what was to be ten years of Merchant Navy service.

In 1957 my parents moved to Upper Belvedere, which meant that, apart from a happy childhood, even including those wartime memories, I had no call to return.

Having then married in 1959 the former Kathleen Mary Adams of Plum Lane, we moved to the West Midlands, where an old shipmate of mine managed to get me taken on by the (then) GPO, and retired to Droitwich Spa in 1990, where we remain today.

2010

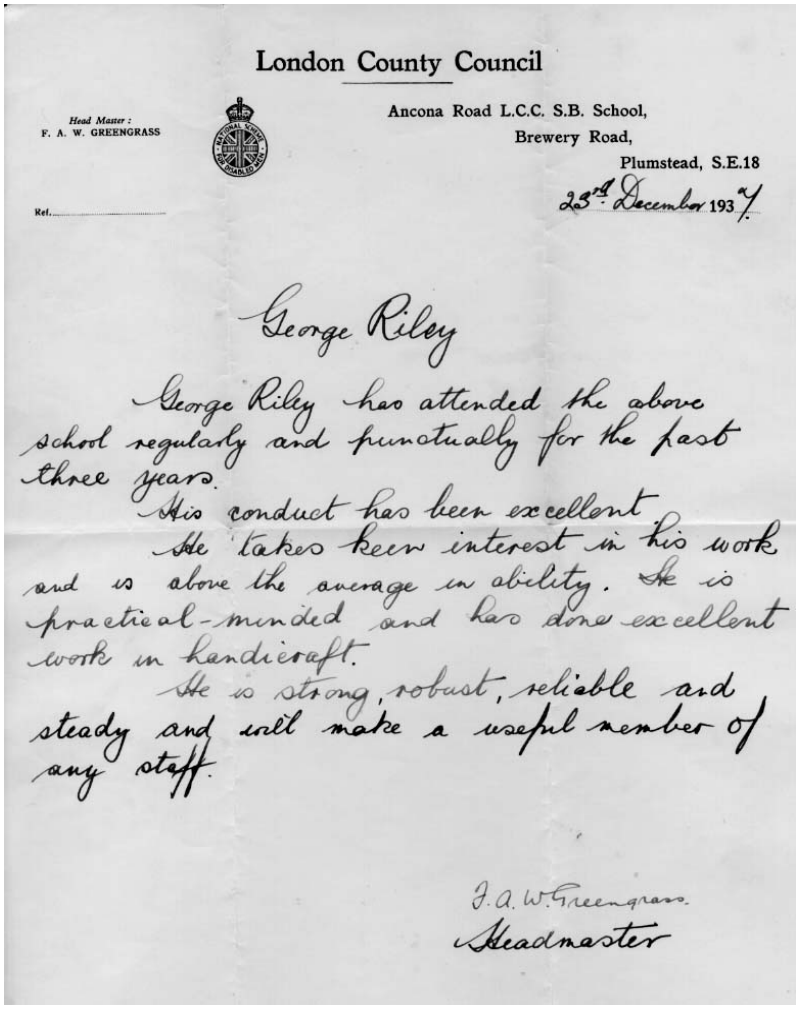
My Riley History In Plumstead

Peter Riley-Jordan

To begin, we have to go at first back to Audley, in Staffordshire, where in 1842 my Great grandfather, Frederick Riley, was born. He is then recorded in the 1891 census as living in Barth Road Plumstead, and his occupation then was as a labourer at Woolwich Arsenal. In 1888 he married Isabella Pearson in the Parish Church of Holy Trinity, Woolwich, on 14th of January that year.

THE RILEY FAMILY 1935
GEORGE AND FRED
ISABEL MAUD WITH JEAN AND MOLLY

On the 15th February 1895 my Grandfather, George John Riley, was born and the family were living at No 42 Barth Road. George John then went on to join the Royal Navy, at least until 1928, a spell as a stoker in the gas works no doubt due to the experience gained in the navy. Finally working for the Matchless Motor Cycle Company until his death in 1961 aged 65. On the 30th December 1922 he married Isabel Maud Houghton at St. Margaret's Parish Church. She was born 30th April 1901 in 48 Elm Street Plumstead. His favourite drinking places were: The Prince Alfred, Raglan Road, and The Plumstead Radical Club, where he was a member.



London County Council

Head Master :
F. A. W. GREENGRASS

Ancona Road L.C.C. S.B. School,
Brewery Road,
Plumstead, S.E.18

Ref.

23rd December 1937

George Riley

George Riley has attended the above school regularly and punctually for the last three years.

His conduct has been excellent.

He takes keen interest in his work and is above the average in ability. He is practical-minded and has done excellent work in handicraft.

He is strong, robust, reliable and steady and will make a useful member of any staff.

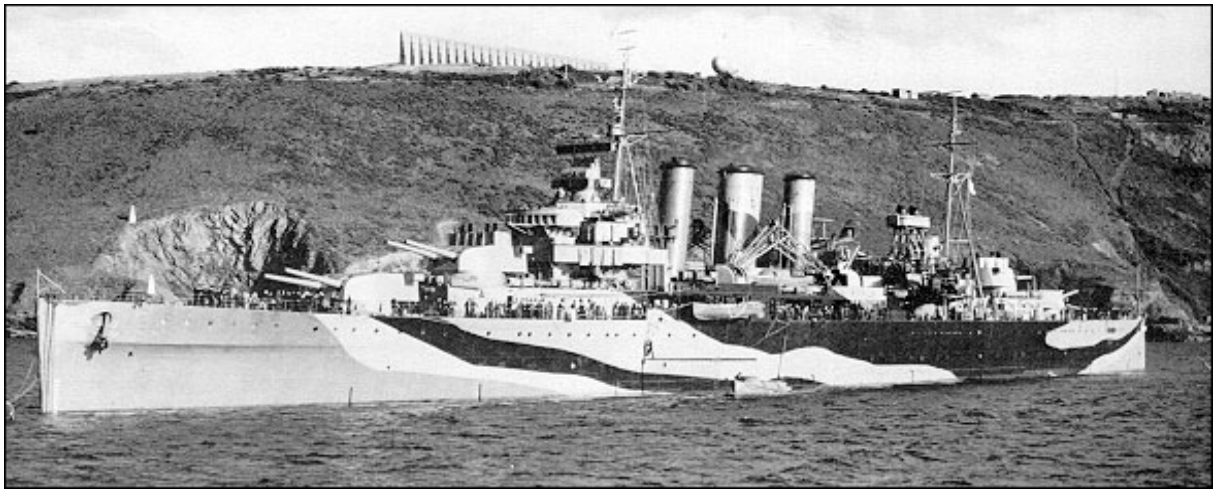
F. A. W. Greengrass.
Headmaster

My father, George Riley, was educated at Ancona School, Brewery Road, Plumstead. Here is the letter from the Headmaster, F.A.W. Greengrass. Dads leaving date was 23rd December 1937.

My father George John Edgar Riley was also born in 42 Barth Road, Plumstead, on the 16th December 1923. The eldest of four (named Frederick, Molly, and Jean).

During the war years, dad was in the Royal Navy and

served on the H.M.S. Kent as a cook, but his action stations was on the "Pom-Pom" guns, and he saw action on the Malta and the Russia convoys and also whilst on active service to Iceland and to the States.



HMS KENT

He was discharged from the navy on the 27th July 1946. By this time the family address was No 34 Hudson Road, Plumstead SE 18.

George met and married my mother Irene Susan Wright, who lived locally in Hudson Road, on the 3rd January 1948 in St Margaret's Church Plumstead, and they moved into No 37. This was where I was to start my early years.

I was the second of four children, Brian being born in hospital at Pembury, in Kent, in 1951. Then myself in St Nicolas' Hospital, Plumstead in 1954. Alan followed in 1957, born also at St Nicolas' Hospital and then Julia, the last in 1958, born in the British Home for Mothers and Babies.

GEORGE AND IRENE RILEY WITH BRIAN AT CHRISTENING

When Alan was born there was a mix-up and we nearly had a baby sister (Stella Allen). There became a friendship between the mothers and later I would be best pals with the son, Stuart Allen, of which there is more later.

JEAN WITH ALF WRIGHT AND LINDA (LEFT) HEATHER (RIGHT) AND BRIAN

We enjoyed our years in No 37, which was a three story house, shared with grand parents on my mother's side. Nearly opposite, we had our grand-father at No 34, in No 29, five houses away, our aunt Vi and uncle Alf and two cousins, Lynda and Heather. Further up the road lived the

Davis family, my brother Alan was to marry one of their family (Terry Davis).

Brian was Christened in St Margaret's Church as was most of us as these photo show.

Jean and Alf were probably God Parents to Brian.

Jean married Eric Hearne in November 1955 and moved to Windsor.

Molly married Reginald Marriott in Sept 1957 and moved to Genesta Road, No 35 if I remember correctly.

Alan, Brian, Peter Riley (1959-60 29 Hudson Road)

Brian, Peter, Alan Riley with Lynda (1959-60 29 Hudson Road)

When my grand father died in 1961, we moved across the road into no.34 and lived quite happily there until 1967.

Primary School

What can I remember about my childhood? Growing up in Plumstead was great; I first went to school at Earl Rise Primary Schoo**l**. Friends there included Stuart Allen, as I've already mentioned, and Lionel Jeffreys, Peter Smart, Terry Williams, Valerie Riley (no relation) Cheryl Roberts, and so many more who's names escape me. Teachers, I remember were: Mr Donnelly, Mrs Poulter,(she made us do Italic writing – ink went everywhere), Headmaster Mr Smith.

Some photos from our school trip to Hindhead, in Surrey.

Mr Donelly - Surrounded by the boys
Stuart Allen (marked X)

Summer Camp again
Lionel (Jeffries?) Right

Circa 1964 Summer camp
Peter Smart - X

Circa 1964 Summer Camp
Terry Williams

At School we had the usual exercise of country dancing, cricket and football in the playground, swimming at either Plumstead or Woolwich baths.

Sunday School

As youngsters we were all taken to Sunday School, The Richmond Gospel Hall in Vicarage Road. It was overseen by the superintendent Mr Jenner. My uncle Reg was a teacher there so slipping off was not an option. 3pm on a Sunday for an hour learning about the gospels and the bible in general. Also there were Mr R Kemp and his wife, they were the organists for as long as I can remember; more memorable though was Susan their daughter..

Local kids included the Tadds, the Barrett sisters, Linda and Sylvia from Vicarage Park Road**.** The Cowling family from Hudson Road, a whole host of them, including David, Ronnie, Susan, and others I've forgotten, and the Davis kids as well.

Mr George Lycett, who lived in Genesta Road, taught there and bought along his boys. George had a very serious limp to one leg, however that did not stop him riding a motor bike and side car. The Gospel Hall relocated to Brewery Road and is still there to this day. Memories include the first hall being very cold in the winter; trips were organised to take the children to Margate and Ramsgate where we had a service on the beach; more important to the kids though, was the swimming and the sand, also we got a taste of Dreamland at Margate with its rides.

Scouting

I joined the Scout movement at the East Plumstead Baptist Church, Griffin Road, the 12th Woolwich. I started as a Cub and enjoyed the life immensely. I made lots of friends there, Tony Robinson from Heavitree Road, and from Robert Street, Phillip and Stephen Tadd, Tony Keeler from Durham Rise.

I usually suffered in a most peculiar way with my dad when Scouting; I asked for a rucksack to go camping – did I get something modern, no – he purchased from the army surplus store (Sams) in Woolwich, something I swear was used by the Desert Rats. When I asked for a knife for Scouting, expecting something to cut twigs and peel an apple, I got a 6 inch sheath

knife almost like the type you see in the Rambo films. It scared everyone in the troop!

I progressed to becoming a patrol leader and was able to choose my patrol name, so chose the Kestrel, my favourite bird ever since.

Camping was great; we went to Meopham, where I saw my first grass snake. Also I remember one bank holiday, we were asked if we had visited the "thunder box" yet. As I hadn't, I got a dose of Andrew's powder. That on top of about 24 prunes still did not have the desired effect. I managed when I got home though…..

The troop used to have tents that were open at both ends and could sleep about eight boys.

I got up one night to water the nearby bushes, and went back into the tent, then thinking the other lads were messing me about as my kit was at the wrong end. I got everyone to wake up and move. It was in the morning I realised I'd gone out one end and back in another – sorry lads!

Holidays

Most holidays were spent visiting relations. I had folk in Ramsgate, Sheerness, and Hastings. So school holidays saw us packed off for a week or two. A most memorable holiday though was to Bournemouth, with Molly and Reg before they had their own children. We travelled down there squeezed into his sidecar. My brother Brian remembers the trip for other reasons to do with the swimming and the waves. I also remember getting rather sun burnt and also knickerbocker glories.

Senior School

Progress from Earl Rise was to follow in the footsteps of my brother Brian, and I went onto Bloomfield Boys Secondary Modern. The first two years were in the Lower school, in Plum Lane. After those years you progressed to the Main school, in Bloomfield Road, for another three years in my case. I made some close friendships there, notably with Les Kinsman, John Wood and John Stewart, who I still am in contact with some 40 years on. Others I remember are: Elton Rothwell, Graham Springhall, Keith Pratt, George Sparrow, George Elliot and quite a few more that are mentioned on the Friends Reunited web site. Teachers, Mr Cuff – English, Mr Williams – French, Mr Coutts – History (and that famous moustache).

General

In retrospect, I believe we had a great upbringing living in Plumstead; we had a great time exploring the many open spaces in and around the area, Plumstead and Winn's Commons, Bostall and Abbey Woods, Woolwich Common and the great Greenwich Park. In 1967 we moved to a new house in The Oaks (No 87) in Burrage Road, my sister Julia still lives there to this day. A quiet estate back then. It was easy also to jump on a No 51 bus to get to the countryside (well Farnborough, in Kent) for a day in the orchards and fruit fields.

Burrage Road seemed to go on for ever, from Plumstead High Street up for at least a mile to Plumstead Common Road. It contained superb three story Victorian town houses at the top of the road, to two up two down at the bottom.

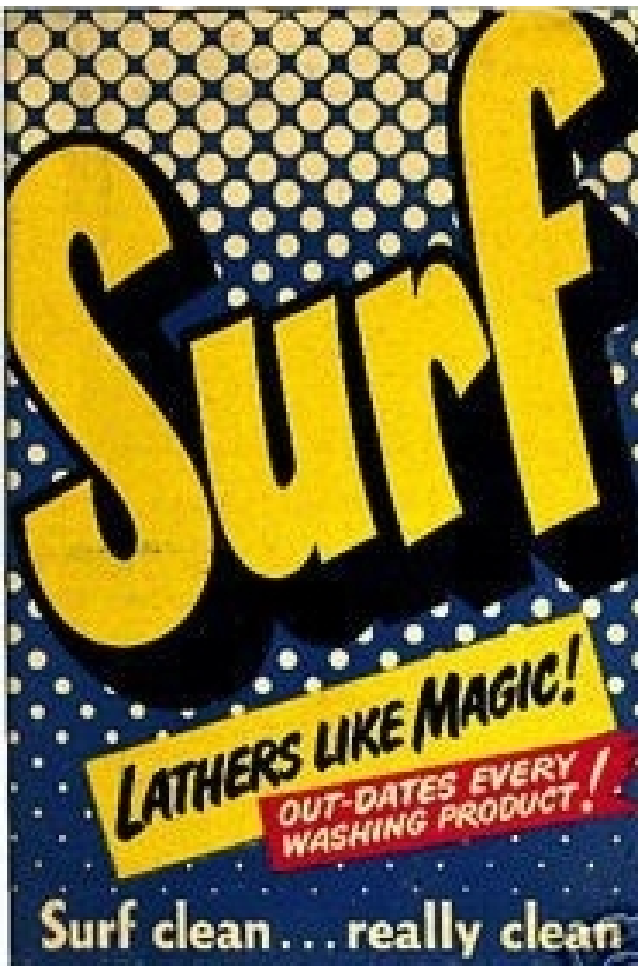
After leaving school I worked, first of all, in nearby Belvedere, then in central London, and then moved away from Plumstead. For a number of years I travelled back weekly to visit and to go to the Woolwich Photographic Society, which at the time met in the Clockhouse

Community Centre, in the Woolwich Dockyard. I remember the Society had a fantastic collection of glass plate slides that often came out of hiding to be either viewed or to be part of a competition, "Then and Now". The Old and Modern side by side. I was lucky enough to become President of the Society for a few years before finally moving away to Leicestershire.

Finally

I do get to go back to visit occasionally, because of family links, but unfortunately I cannot wait to return home. The area seems to be so crowded now, Even with its good transport network the car seems to have taken over. To manoeuvre through streets that were not built to cope with the volume of parked cars is quite a change from those years gone by when the car in most streets was an event.

Maybe it's just my age!



My Wartime Childhood

Peter Beaumont

I was born on the 25th January 1938 in Woolwich at Wood Street Home for British Mothers and Babies.

At the time my mother and father had a brand new three bedroom semi-detached house bought in 1928 for £600 at Bostall Heath, an area in which there were many anti-aircraft guns later on.

Just after the war started, my house received a great deal of blast-damage when the house next door took a direct hit. We all had Anderson Shelters in the garden and each time the sirens warned of danger we moved straight into them. Luckily no-one was ever hurt when the house was hit.

After this we had to be re-housed — from there we were moved to a house in Plumstead, in the rear of a bomb-damaged house. At the front of the house, it was used as a council office and although we lived in the back of the house I wasn't allowed in the front.

At about the same time, when I was 2 years old, I had bronchitis and nearly died. The school across the road had blast shelters under the playground — you'd go down steps with a corrugated iron roof until you were about 10ft underground. At the other end of the shelter there was an iron ladder going up and a handle which you wound to open a trapdoor in the roof — this was the way out if a bomb closed off the other entrance/exit. There were double bunk beds on either side and no heating as far as I can recall. And the shelter smelt strongly of strong disinfectant. These were used for the duration of the war.

I recall one evening my mum and dad were out and my Aunt was looking after us. When my parents returned, a family argument began over whether or not I should have received a hot drink. As a result my parents and I went to sleep in the house where my father turned a settee over for us to sleep under. This was my new sleeping place for the next few months as my father objected to going back to the shelter.

Living in Woolwich, we regularly saw air attacks due to the Royal Docks being on the opposite side of the Thames and a tempting target for the German Air-force. On occasion we'd look up to the skies and see Spitfires apparently attempting to divert the German doodlebugs away from the crowded residential areas and into the river.

Dad used to take me to the woods on Bostall Heath to watch the searchlights looking around for German planes. We could only get so far because of the security though — all the rumours of spies made people very cautious in the area.

One memory I have is of the graveyard at St Nicholas Church at Plumstead receiving a direct hit from a V2 rocket one night. I was indoors being washed by my mum at the time but was quickly pushed under the table by my mum when the explosion sounded. The next day we went to look at the damage and inside the church there was a big crack along a large tomb and, the big kids had broken into the coffin — when we went to play one of my friends removed the skull from the coffin and we started to throw it to each other. We used to fight with the bones and sword fight with them — it sounds horrible now but it was what we did

as kids! We used to make camps in the graveyard and dare the girls to walk through at night.

My elder cousin was evacuated to Gloucester where he had to work on a farm. Unfortunately, the people with whom he was staying, beat him and, after a letter back to my aunt, he soon returned to London. My parents immediately decided that I would stay with them at home.

By the time the war ended I was 7 years old and they had the VE street party to celebrate the end of the war against Germany. However, I wasn't able to celebrate as I had pneumonia, although the doctor suspected it may have been meningitis. There weren't many drugs available for civilians, although children were taken care of. One person in particular who took care of me was a local Jewish man who had a stall and a shop selling mainly fruit and vegetables. He used to bring my mother fruit and vegetables to help me get better. He'd been attacked before the war by the fascists (black shirts), those sympathising with Hitler's aims.

I stayed in bed and had to imagine everyone else celebrating. However, I did manage to celebrate on VJ day when the war with the Japanese ended.

Later on I was conscripted to the Royal Engineers where I saw service in Kenya.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

Nurse Mary

Mary Pollock

I was working in an institute in a TB hospital called Grove Park. I was a nurse and thoroughly enjoyed it! I was evacuated from St Nicolas hospital in Plumstead and went to Grove park. I was 20, I didn't have a boyfriend at the time, I was too busy concentrating on my studies! I remember the day war was declared; it was a Sunday 3rd September and we had just got in from Church and I and my colleagues were waiting for a meal. At the time I didn't' think much of it, I worried about the restrictions. We were not too pleased when we were warned that when there were air raids we would have to sleep on the floor and in the shelters which we were not too happy about. We were based quite near Woolwich Arsenal where they produced a lot of the guns but we weren't allowed to go near there. I don't remember seeing any bombs fall but we were working in the blackout. Working in the hospital we saw a lot of the casualties, especially during the doodlebug period (doodlebug was a type of bomb that Hitler brought in; you could hear the certain type of whistle they would make, instead of dropping straight down they would go a further distance, the fainter the noise of the whistle the more you knew you were safe.!) At first I was afraid of the bombs but as you got to know the noise made, you would thank God that it wasn't you when they fell somewhere else. You were upset for the patients who were affected by them; some had lost limbs and suffered serious injuries! My colleagues were a major support for me. and in the early hours, around 2am, a bomb fell into the house where I was working.

I had a colleague called Mary Fleming, who rescued people from the top floor of which she was awarded the St George's Cross. Another girl had a boyfriend who was a reporter who reported the story.

In VE day I was in Bedfordshire because I had an illness; I watched the sky full of aeroplanes heading to Germany but we didn't realise what it was all about until we heard it on the news!

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Obituary: Charlie Fuller 1919-2004

Supplied by Lyn Davidson

Charlie Fuller, centre-half of the 1938 Amateur Cup Final team, died suddenly on 16th November at his home in Sheppey at the age of 85. He made barely 100 appearances for the Deres (Erith and Belvedere) and never scored for us, but his influence on local and indeed national football went much further.

Charlie and brother Tommy in the F.A. Amateur Cup Final, at Bromley, 1949 (The photo was signed to my granddad Charlie Fuller, known as' Sonny' from the boxer Freddie Mills.) That was a very proud day for him to see his two sons holding The F.A. Amateur Cup.

Charlie Fuller was born on 25 May 1919, and his exposure to the Deres came early: his father, and Charlie played at Park View from 1921-23, being a regular for Belvedere and District in their last season and Erith and Belvedere in their first.

Charlie junior moved from Sladedale Road, Plumstead to Dagenham at the age of 10, where he attended Grafton School and sat next to Jim Peters, later world-famous as a marathon runner. He was an outstanding player for Dagenham Boys before moving with the family back to Sladedale Road, Plumstead at the age of 16.

Charlie joined Erith and Belvedere from Bostall Heath and made his début in a 1-0 defeat at Gillingham Reserves on 24 April 1937, a month before his 18th birthday. The following season, he was ever-present in the 13-match Amateur Cup run that took the Deres to the Final and that massive 33,346 crowd at the Den, sadly losing 1-0 to Bromley.

Both Bromley and the Amateur Cup would feature again in his career. Charlie left for

Walthamstow Avenue during the summer of 1938, not to return to the Deres' colours (apart from one guest appearance in 1941) for nearly 14 years. He served in the Royal Artillery during the war, but his family recalls him playing football more than he was on duty. In fact, they have a photo of him being presented to King George VI at Stamford Bridge before a Services Cup game between the Army and the RAF, which the RAF won 4-1. At the end of the war he was in liberated Holland, playing for Bromley v Arnhem nine days before VE Day, when three planes came flying low over the ground. The visitors were scared witless until the planes dropped thousands of red carnations as thanks to the British 'liberators''. Charlie and his team-mates were presented with plaques after the 4-1 win.

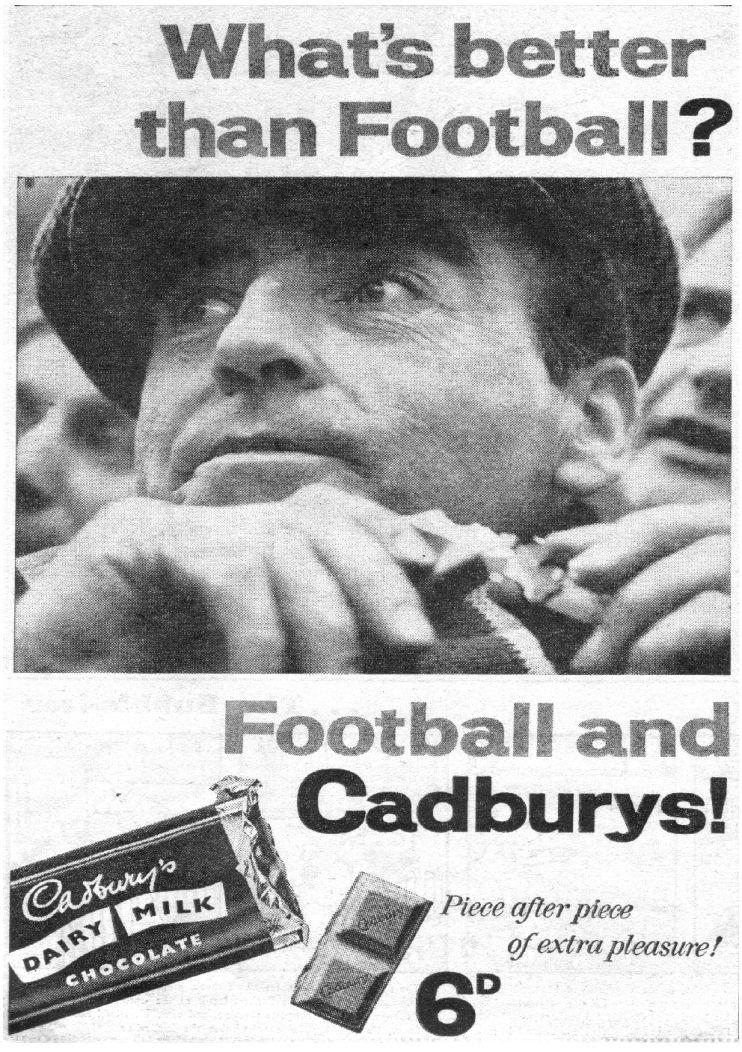
The attendances post-war years were a boom time for English football. 1948-49 was the year Football League reached 41 million; the Deres' attendance record was set, and the Amateur Cup Final moved to Wembley. That year Charlie had the proudest moment of his life, leading Bromley to a 1-0 win over Romford under the twin towers in front of a crowd of 95,000. He was offered professional terms by an Italian club - his family could not remember which - in a letter from Walter Winterbottom offering him a double-figure weekly wage (pounds, not lira!), but he stayed with Bromley, and had another career peak when he captained the Great Britain team in the 1952 Helsinki Olympics.

The Deres had a rough start to 1952-53, and after only half a dozen games manager John Beby resigned. His replacement caused a sensation: Charlie Fuller, still an England amateur international, came from Bromley as player-manager along with his brother Tommy, an occasional Deres player in the 40s. Charlie guided the team through a very difficult season, the one during which Park View and much of the town was flooded. The following season he spoke of bringing "the Continental style" to Park View, by which he meant "attack and defence moving forward together and at top speed". The innovation was only partially successful, as the Deres finished mid-table in the Corinthian League, and the season was a watershed for Charlie. In October 1953 he represented the Corinthian League in a friendly against a touring Trinidad side at Selhurst Park, but three months later he suffered torn ankle ligaments on a recently relaid pitch at Hitchin, and on 24 April 1954 a twisted knee in a match against Grays spelt the end of his playing career, a month short of his 35th birthday. Now only the Deres' manager, Charlie had a modest return in 1954-55, and was involved in controversy when the club were docked two points for fielding an ineligible player - Jorgen Sorensen had played while registered with Epsom - but he managed the Corinthian League representative side to a 3-1 win, and the Deres lost to the eventual winners, Bishop Auckland, in an epic Amateur Cup tie, 50 years ago next January. At the end of the season, at a function at which he was presented with his London FA cap (15 years late owing to a little local difficulty in 1940), he stated that he was "enjoying football with this club (E&B) more than any other as player or manager". Six months later, after a poor start to 1955-56, he was replaced.

Charlie moved on to Slade Green FC, where for a while he worked alongside the upcoming boxer (and current Deres president) Larry O'Connell. Subsequently he moved to Ryarsh, in north Kent, to become a publican at the Duke of Wellington. There followed moves to Eastbourne, Crowborough and finally Sheppey, with Charlie organising sports teams everywhere he went, even giving "pep talks" to junior schools teams in Sheppey.

Charlie Harrison picked Charlie Fuller in his all-time Deres XI, calling him "a fearless great centre-half in the Stan Cullis mould". He was renowned for his heading ability, reputedly able to head the ball half the length of the pitch, and a hapless Uxbridge forward was said to have been knocked out when hit by a Fuller headed clearance one day in 1952. His daughter Sandra has a cartoon from the Daily Express in which she, at the age of five, is saying, "My dad's just kicked the ball with his head". But as Alzheimer's set in during the last 18 mouths of his life, and stories emerged of the long-term effects on the likes of Jeff Astle of heading the football, the family began to wonder...

Sandra recalls her father running onto the pitch with a rare passion in his eyes and giving every game 100% commitment. Few of us can recall his playing days, but I was lucky enough to meet him at the reunion in 1997, still a barrel-chested, immensely strong-looking man, and hear how he still felt the tingle, seeing teams coming out at Wembley on Cup Final day as he had done in 1949. Thank you Charlie, one of the Deres' greats. His funeral took place on Monday 29th at 1.00pm at the Garden of England Crematorium in Bobbing, Isle of Sheppey.



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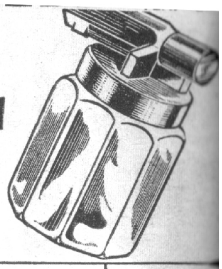

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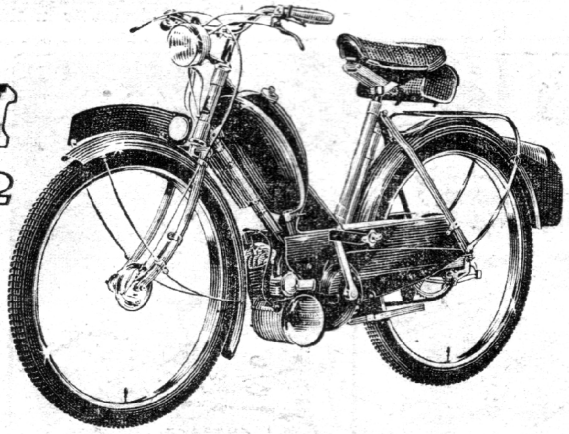

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Old Father Thames . . And Me

Christopher Martyn

From the upstairs front windows of our house, in St John's Terrace, you could just see the Thames through a gap across the Common, between the houses of Heavitree Road and Bramblebury Road. I say you could see the river, but what you were really looking at was not the water itself but some of the tallest structures that lined the waterfront, like the giant cranes of the Arsenal, or the sheds and warehouses of the Royal Docks. On a bright sunny day, with the aid of my dad's old leather-covered brass binoculars, I could make out the funnels of ships moving slowly in and out of the docks. As often as not, though, visibility wasn't so good, what with industrial pollution in the air or seasonal mists and fog.

If we couldn't *see* the river, we could certainly *hear* it. Hooters would be sounding all day long and well into the night. Manoeuvring those massive ships through the entrance to the docks was precision stuff. The captains used a code – a set number of long or short hoots – to signal their manoeuvring intentions. As a small boy I was occasionally taken to that alien land 'over the water', to Pier Road, North Woolwich, where Molly Knight, my Mum's friend from the days before the war lived, when they both worked at Standard Telephones. If I was lucky I would get to see one of those ships at close hand and marvel at its sheer size. Long, sides like a cliff-face, punctuated by rows of port-holes and often streaked with rust and salt. You risked getting a crick in the neck trying to glimpse the crewmen going about their work high up on the decks. Famous shipping lines like P&O and Blue Star regularly used the Royal Docks and it was thrilling to think of these vessels sailing around the globe to far-off places like Bombay and Buenos Aires. Years later, when I was a university student, I would normally travel to college by No 53 bus to New Cross and then by tube to Whitechapel and then on to Mile End. But sometimes – just for the sake of variety – I would go via North Woolwich. Then, from the top deck of the 101 bus, I had a grandstand view of the docks and their ships as we crossed over the swing bridges, first the King George V then the Royal Albert docks, before carrying on through Canning Town to Stratford and beyond. Not infrequently, the bus had to wait at one of the bridges while a ship made its regal progress past our very noses. The wait could be a long one, so the bus driver would switch off the engine, dismount from his cab and enjoy a quiet fag at the roadside.

To get to North Woolwich meant either using the free ferry or the foot tunnel. I have many happy memories of the ferry, particularly in those bygone days when the boats were coke-fired paddle-steamers, not a far cry from the exotic-looking Mississippi steamboats pictured in my *Children's Encyclopaedia*. Ferry boats such as the *Gordon*, the *Will Crooks* and the others vessels had a rather drab and workaday appearance, with their 'cargo' of motorcycles, cars, vans and lorries, although a splash of colour was guaranteed if an Albion Sugar Company tanker was on board, with the sun glinting off its distinctive green livery and bright chrome. Once on the passenger deck I would rush to look down into the engine-room where shiny steel pistons powered back and forth with a powerful throbbing that could be felt throughout the boat. The smell of oil and hot metal was addictive, and infinitely preferable to the pungent reek of the river, which you couldn't avoid if you stayed outside, especially in warm weather. My parents made sure I kept well away from the taffrail, fully believing the

stories about people who had fallen overboard and died within minutes from swallowing that toxic mix of Thames water. By the time I was in my final year, at Queen Mary College, the old boats were replaced with new diesel-powered vessels, painted in a 'high visibility' colours of lived yellow and white. They were much cleaner, of course, and faster than their steam-driven forebears, but they had a lot less 'character'. There were no college lectures on a Wednesday afternoons, so I would occasionally be back in North Woolwich by lunch-time, and I recall sitting in Victoria Gardens eating my sandwiches to the relentless accompaniment of pile-drivers thumping away as the concrete piles for the were driven in for the new piers that would eventually get vehicles onto the new ferry were under construction.

The Woolwich Foot tunnel, like the one at Greenwich, would be fairly deserted late at night, and, if you were walking solo, was an experience to be got over as swiftly as possible. I remember the weird, short echoing sounds of my footsteps being thrown back from the tiled walls and the strategically-placed fire-points along the curved wall, that conveniently measured out the distance you had walked. At other times, during the rush hours, you felt as if you were being carried along in a fast-moving stream of people as you tried to thread your way between those coming from the other direction. At either end I preferred the staircase to the lift as it was much quicker and good 'cardio-vascular exercise', although no-one called it that in those days.

One particular recollection I have of the river in the 1950's was that of watching the RAF fly-past every year, at lunch-time on Battle of Britain Day, during September. The planes flew from east to west, following the course of the Thames. Out in front would be a Hurricane and a Spitfire; behind them would come other surviving veterans of WW2, such as the bombers and so on, and behind them the more modern aircraft, like the Gloster Meteor and Hawker Hunter jets. These were days long before the Red Arrows and the RAF Memorial Flight that are 'must-haves' for any air show organiser today. We trained our trusty binoculars on each formation as it passed and followed it for a few brief seconds over the rooftops of Bramblebury Road and St Margaret's Church before it disappeared from view. I always disliked the fact that our part of the Common was so well endowed with big trees, which were still in full leaf at that time of year, thereby curtailing our pleasure; there simply wasn't time to cross to Winn's Common, which offered a much better vantage-point. My mother, who was intensely proud of her years in the WAAF, was most insistent that I get out quickly, at the end of morning school, and run home so as not to miss this annual spectacle.

Although we lived in the fresh air of Plumstead Common, half-way up Shooters Hill and well above sea level, my mother's family had long connections in and around the Thames. My great-great-grandfather, James Levitt, was a Thames Waterman, as was his son, Thomas Livett. They both hailed from Greenwich. Eventually, Thomas exchanged the water for dry land and became a foreman in the Royal Arsenal and was put in charge of No 1 Powder Magazine, which was located on Plumstead Marshes, right beside the river at Tripcock Point. My grandfather, William Henry, and his brother, George Samuel, were both born in the Foreman's Quarters, adjacent to the Ammunition Stores. Family legend has it that their mother, Ellen, was so traumatised by her witnessing the sinking of the pleasure-steamer *SS Princess Alice* and the consequent loss of 640 lives, in 1878, that she gave birth to George

prematurely and that it was touch and go for mother and child for some time afterwards. But both survived, Ellen making it to her late seventies and George to his nineties.

All's well that ends well. Granddad, who also lived to be ninety-three, used to regale me with stories about his boyhood on the Thames; boating; swimming; fishing; fowling; and also drawing and painting the wildlife. I greatly treasure a studio portrait photograph I have of him taken in 1898, when he was nineteen years old. He looks really dapper in his peaked cap and long jacket and waistcoat, with their rows of brass buttons. The cap-badge and buttons bear the initials T.C.M. or T.G.M. I wish I knew what those letters stand for. The 'T' must be for Thames, surely, but what of the rest?

Thomas William Livett, my great-grandfather, who lived from 1837 to 1910. He was Foreman of No 1 Powder Magazine in the Arsenal.

I have many memories of sitting beside the Thames at various points along its length, listening to the water lapping and watching the steady traffic of tugs and barges; dredgers; PLA and the police launches, pleasure boats, and so forth passing by. Having been a boy at the Roan School I naturally have fond recollections of that superbly panoramic view of the Thames you get from Wolfe's statue in Greenwich Park, and of the closer view of the river from the terrace of the Trafalgar Tavern, close by the Royal Naval College.

Ellen Livett (nee Bridle) Thomas Livett's (second) wife who lived from 1853 to 1931.

It is gratifying to know that my ancestors had earned their living on this stretch of water, serving those whose business took them up and down its busy waters on its ebbing tides, and that I was brought up and educated within sight, sound and smell of that same great old river. My favourite views of the Thames are not those from Greenwich however, but those from Plumstead Common or Woolwich, from say, Parson's Hill, by the Odeon cinema, where the trolleybuses once used to turn round.

So familiar, so special.

My Grandfather, William Henry Livett, who lived from 1879 to 1972. He is the second son of the two above persons and was born in the Forman's Quarters house, pictured below.

How many of you remember the song that begins *Kingdoms may come, Kingdoms may go*? Later on it goes like this:

What does he know? What does he care?

Nothing for you or me.

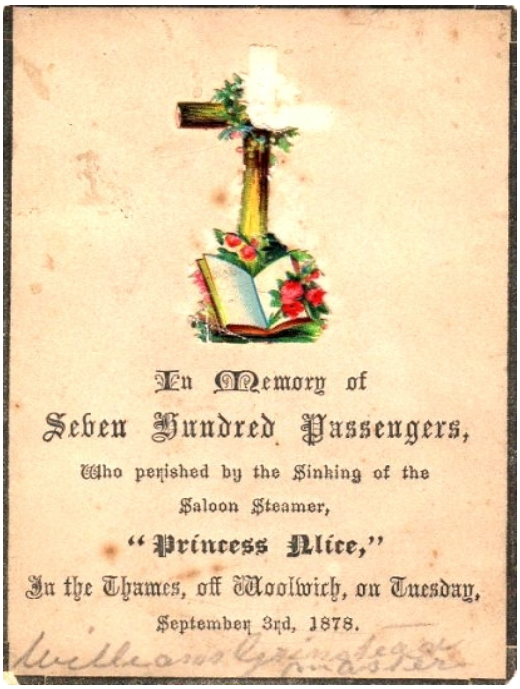
But Old Father Thames keeps rolling along

Down to the mighty sea.

Written in 1933 by Raymond Wallace and Betty O'Hogan, this song would often be heard on the radio and I am pretty sure we learned to sing it at school. It had a very stirring tune,

somehow ideally suited to express the majesty of the river and its enduring personality as a 'Father' to all that lived and worked on and around his shores.

Foreman's Quarters, No 1 Powder Magazine, Royal Arsenal. (located on Plumstead Marshes, right beside the river at Tripcock Point) The painting was done by a local artist, nobody famous! in 1884. William and his brother George are depicted on the far right, standing by the fence.



Mourning card for the victims of the Princess Alice disaster.

Although I now live in Worcestershire and have a great affection for the River Severn and the Teme, which flow only a few miles from my house, I am still proud to call the Thames 'My' river.

See also story: The Great Thames Disaster by Gavin Thurston in book, Common Folk vol 2.

Our Anderson Shelter

Kathleen Bird

My most vivid memory of WW2 was the time spent in an Anderson shelter. I lived with my parents in south east London near Woolwich Arsenal. There was a park opposite where barrage balloons, a small gun and searchlights were situated.

My mother, brother and myself used to play Ludo in the evenings, which helped my mother relax a little before the air raids started. As soon as we heard the wailing of the sirens we would go into the shelter which was in the garden. Sometimes it was very dark and we would carefully use a torch. Usually the sky was lit up with searchlights. Often we could see fires where the German planes had dropped incendiary bombs.

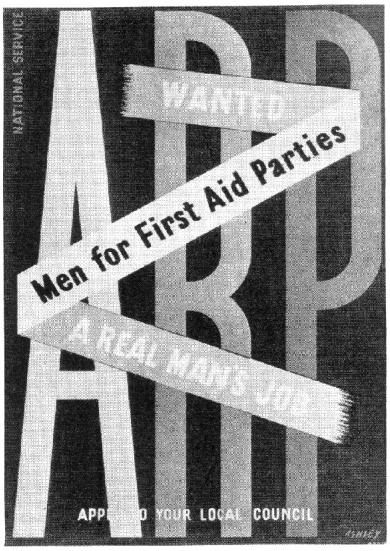
We often took a jug of hot cocoa with us as it was very cold in our shelter. Also, every evening the kettle and several saucepans would be filled with cold water as sometimes the water mains would be damaged which meant no water in the morning.

Once in the shelter we would continue our game of Ludo by candlelight. Then the terrible noise would begin of the guns, droning of the planes and the thud of the bombs falling. It was very noisy and frightening.

We were all very pleased to hear the All Clear siren but wondered if we had any damage to our house. Sometimes there would be a fallen ceiling or a broken window. The plaster and glass were put onto the kerb to be collected later by a lorry. The ceilings and windows were patched up and repaired properly after the War.

We were always hoping for a foggy night as planes would not fly, which meant a good night's sleep in our bed.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'



Our Families Earlier Days

Bill Stokes (Junior)

I was born on the 18th July 1949. I lived in a tenement building in Govan, Glasgow in Scotland until 1955. I had been at school for only a short while. Suddenly, I was living in Abbey Wood in SE London!.

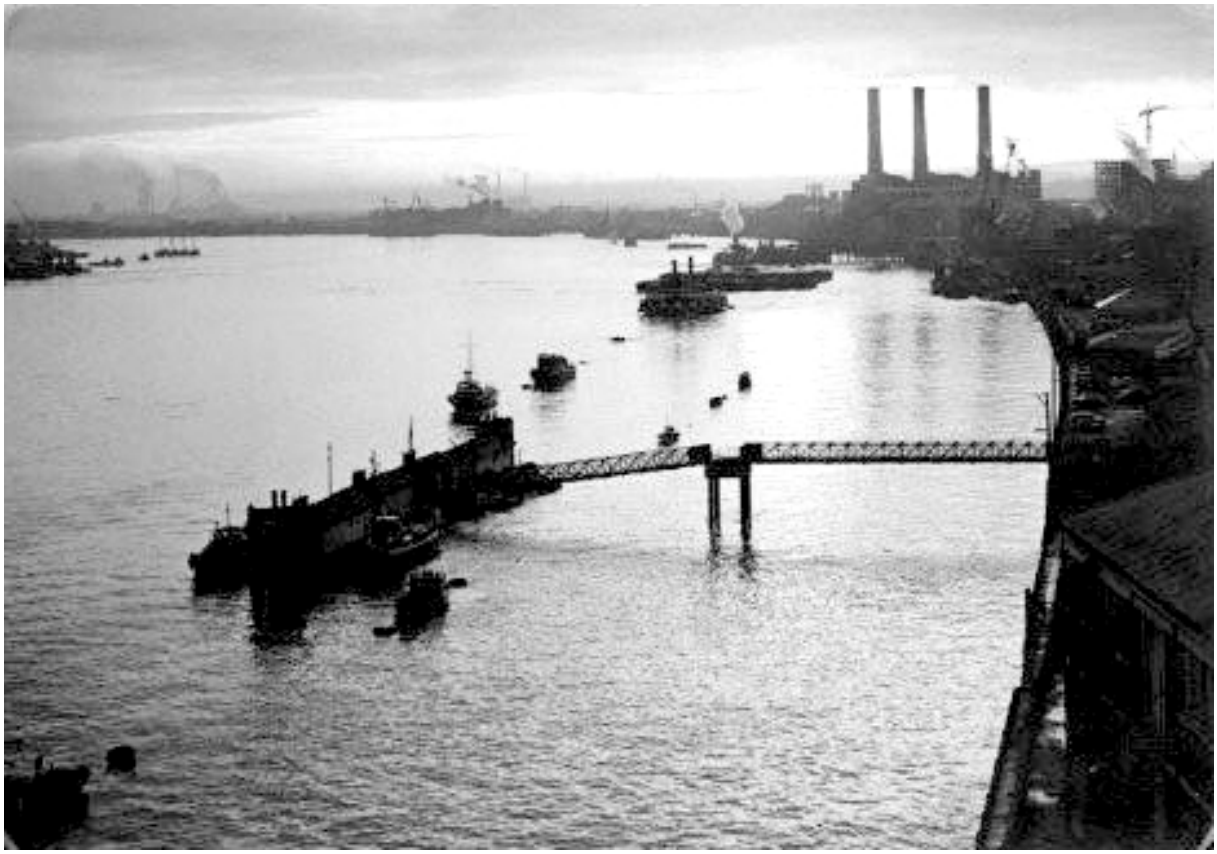
Back yard of grandparent's rented house at 48 Birkdale Rd. Abbey Wood. (1958)
Left to right: My paternal grandmother, Florence Louise (nee Homerstone) me, William James (always known as Billy), my sister Margaret Louise, born 23.12.46, my mother, Christina (Chrissie) (nee McMahon) born 15.11.21 and grandfather, William James Richard George Stokes.

We moved in the May of that year and my first memory was the Spring blossom on the trees in Birkdale Road. I had a strong Glasgow accent and rapidly changed to the S. London accent. I always have empathy for immigrants! I was often embarrassed by my mother's Glasgow accent when my friends came round. I always felt a bit different and we always had our holidays in Scotland, when all my school mates went to Margate or Leysdown and such places.

My first visit to the doctors was on Plumstead High Street near Purrett Road. I recall on one hot summers day, Dr Hoffman was sitting at his desk with his bare feet on the desk as I walked in! The NHS was only six years old (approx) it would not be allowed now!

I lived on Plumstead Common from 1958 to 1970. In Kirkham Street and then No 6 Warwick Terrace. I went to Galleons Mount and then to Bloomfield School. I recall whilst at

Bloomfield, a boy called Martyn (Goldy) Goldstein whose parents had a decorators shop on Plumstead High Street. I went to school with Ian Gazzard. Ian's family lived in the new houses in Warwick Terrace. It took me a time to settle in at Gallions Mount Primary school; I became short sighted and my reading was poor. But it eventually improved and my happier school days were at Bloomfield school. I shocked everyone when I got 5 O levels in 1965. Mr Wright, Deputy Head, persuaded me to stay on to the 6th form.



Thames River scene 1963, from the Albion Sugar Co. at dawn. Woolwich Power Station chimneys. Note the twin funnels of two moored ferry boats, one is smoking, getting ready for the busy day ahead. Photo: Bill Stokes Snr.

My father, Bill Stokes,worked at Oliver Pell Control (OPC) from 1956 to 60. He had a work mate called Harry Abrahams and they often called the firm 'Varleys'. There was an Italian lady worker, called Marcella, from OPC who came to our house at 45 Kirkham Street. Harry Abrahams eventually left OPC and opened a furniture store near Beresford Square, but it went bust and so he got a job driving buses on the 53 route.

My father eventually left OPC and went doing shift work at the Albion Sugar Co. and then Woolwich Poly. We also lived in a new council house at 6 Warwick Terrace, near the Old Mill Pub.

My dad was a keen amateur photographer and I took numerous photos of the Plumstead and Woolwich areas.

Dad originally came from Lewisham. He married my mother in Glasgow in 1945. We moved to Birkdale Road, Abbey Wood in 1955.

We lived with my grandparents. My grandfather (also Bill Stokes) was a gate keeper at the Arsenal gates in Beresford Square. He was also an Arsenal Air Raid Warden (ARP) during the war. He told me that he saw a figure exit a bombed house during a raid, (in Plumstead Lower Road), The figure staggered headless and then collapsed! I was told this when I was six years old and still remember it.

Dad in the back garden of 45 Kirkham Street.

We moved to 45 Kirkham Street, Plumstead Common in 1958. My mother took her washing to the public laundry in a pram, which was near the Plumstead swimming baths on Plumstead High Street. In 1959, she got a job making up lampshades at home. She collected them from a factory near Lakedale Road and she glued the frills on them and then she took them back to the factory in the pram. In 1960, she got a job at Standard Telephone Cables in North Woolwich, from 11am-4pm, doing electrical soldering work for telephone repeaters in submarine cables; very precise work with high quality control. STC offered to move us all to the new town in Basildon, but my dad said no. So we carried on renting the house in Kirkham Street until we were re housed in 1962. We had a tin bath that hung on the wall of the outside toilet in the back yard which was brought in on Friday nights for our baths. My mother was made redundant in the late 60s and she finished her working days as a cleaner at the Officers Mess at the Woolwich Garrison.

My grandmother had four children. They were my father, William James Richard (Born 26.1.1919), then Leonard, then a daughter called Florence. Another boy was born in the mid 1930s, named Bernard. He later joined the Royal Military Police. Dad was always called 'Wibs' by his family.

In 1962, we moved to a new council house at 6 Warwick Terrace, (It had been a bombsite from WWII) the Old Mill Pub was on the corner. We moved to this house in July 1962. Kirkham Street was demolished and flats were put up. The new council house had a bathroom and an inside toilet. We felt very lucky, we had a lovely open view and my mum shopped across at the Links R.A.C.S shops. There was only one gas fire in the house and on Boxing Day in 1962 it started to snow. The house was very cold and the winter was very long.

Bill, on right, with his friends Michael Burgess, Eddy Leman, Winn's Common paddling pool playground 1959. We were in the same class at Galleons Mount Primary.

Bloomfield 6th form, Autumn 1966.

Front Row: 3rd from left Clinton Evans, Mr. Wright Deputy Head) Tom Smith (Head) John Anderson (Headboy) ,Self, Keith Jones.

Third row up: 4th from left Graham Ryder, 6th from left Louis Martin.

We lived on the left side of the street about half way up. On the corner was a sweet shop and the first house on the right, in Kirkham Street was a doctors, Dr Marr, a Scotsman, and a female doctor, Dr Horton. Further up on the left was a working men's club. On summers evenings on, Saturday nights, we could hear the music in our back garden. I always remember the hit tune 'I Never Felt More Like Singing the Blues' being played.

My mother died in 1995 and my father died in 1999.

I now live in West Yorkshire.

Our Family

Mark Weightman

Our mother was born in Kilrush in County Clare, on the rugged west coast of Ireland. This small town is where, at only 3 weeks of age, her mother died leaving her an orphan. We are aware of at least three families that brought our mother up. Mum was christened Mary Josephine McInerney but was called Maureen. My mother's formative years resulted her being marshalled by the nuns, which culmination of all this contributed to her Irish short fuse which our father and we kids learnt to accept. Dad said to me in my later life "Mum is like the West Coast of Ireland where she was born, wild, windy but often tranquil". Dad met her in Westcliff, Lea on Sea. She was working in service, having left her native land to seek a better life. Dad, a highly intelligent man, once said to me "Son, it was a big step for your mother to leave Ireland on her own and come to start a new life in England."

Mum and dad's wedding 29th March 1937, with uncle jack and dad's sister, our aunt Wynn, on the left and right.

Many years later when I had my own hairdressing salon and was married with two young boys of our own. Mum and dad had sold their last home in Manor Park in East London to live above my shop. I took mum and dad out for evening tea to a village outside Folkestone. We all sat outside the restaurant as it was a beautiful sunny evening, when mum started to cry softly. She was then blind having lost her sight about a year earlier. Looking at dad he said "Mum is sad because she never knew her father." I knew that mum had just one photograph of him and that she had given it to a photographer in Southend to duplicate copies but unfortunately this photograph was mislaid or was lost.

Again, many more years later, on a visit to Kilrush in Ireland, I learnt that mum's folk were horse traders and so we are partly descended from the Irish 'travelling' gypsy folk.

Our nanny, dad's mum.

Mum and dad Weightman started married life in New Cross in SE London. Dad was a Prudential insurance agent. They lodged with a Mrs Boxshal in a terraced house rear of New Cross railway station. By all accounts it was a happy household. Mrs Boxshal made the most delicious shortbread. Mum told me how she regretted not having taken up the offer of being shown how to make it 'the Boxshal way'. Although still in contact with Mrs Boxshal and her family, mum and dad then moved to Waller Road. A street near New Cross Bus Garage at the start of the Old Kent Road. Mum told me she discovered their flat was full of bugs and like Adolf Hitler who remarked that 'he'd bomb bug infested London'. She also declared war on those bugs in Waller Road. The result was that the bugs vacated the flat and moved to the flat above!

Then the big event. I was born! In St Nicholas Hospital, Plumstead SE18. Mum and dad by then had moved to 85 Sladedale Road. Mum told me in my teens that it was very cold weather when she brought me home from the hospital. She laid me in front of the open fire and prayed she would live to see me a man. I failed her in a few ways. (I explain later in another story) later we moved to Number 71 Sladedale Road (which a few years later on, dad bought from the landlord Mr Jack Noad).

During WWII and living at 71 Sladedale Road, I recall one of the first air raids and the deep organ sound of the thrusting exhaust note of a V1 – doodlebug. It vibrated and rattled the roof slates on 71. Mum screamed out our dad's name "Frank! Frank! " But dad was away on the coastal Ack-Ack/searchlight battery sites with the Royal Artillery at Burton Bradstock in Dorset. (It was thought there could be a German invasion mounted along the Chesil beach coast) Mum calmed herself by cuddling us kids and uttered, 'we will win the war'. All this is so vivid in my mind and yet I was so very young at around five or six years old. Yes, I really do remember...

Dad in the army at Burton Bradstock during WWII. (fourth from left, back row)

***Village Canteen**: Gunner Weightman of the British Army, an old habitue, hands round home-made cakes in April 1944 at Burton Bradstock, to Corporal James Flower of Walpole, Massachusetts, Private First-class Roy St. Jean of Springfield, Mass., and Corporal Allan Decker of Chicago.*
Photos courteous: www.burtonbradstock.org.uk

John and I then find ourselves in Burton Bradstock. Dad found a cottage in Burton village because mum of course missed dad, but also couldn't face the threat of the V2s, which made no sound before destruction, to her and her family that had now grown to three boys with the arrival of baby Colin. The move to Burton Bradstock I have never forgotten. We lived next to a very friendly couple, the

“Thorners”. I have forgotten the Christian name of Mrs Thorner but Mr Thorner was well known as 'Jack Cut' Thorner' because of the hat he wore. I was very fond of Jack. He was a real character, a rough diamond. He could survive in the countryside could this man. He made clothes pegs, snared the countless wild rabbits in the hills, sometimes selling their fur. He also collected the wild field mushrooms in September, fished and had many connections with all the farmers and folk. He'd also gathered windfall apples and was also a handy man in more ways than one. Yes I remember a few times when Mr Thorner would stop outside a “place”with me in his old truck and firmly tell me not to touch the dashboard, I'm sure he locked me in too. I recall when he returned to the truck from a visit to a cottage, he gave me 6 pence, well, I didn’t touch anything on his dashboard. Mum would just say “Get up in the cab” when there was a trip out with Jack and he would appear and we'd drive off on another spontaneous trip somewhere. We'd go up into the wet and windy hills above the Chesil beach where Mr Thorner would set the wire slip knot rabbit snares, secured to the ground with one or two wooden pegs driven into the ground, usually in a rabbit run. The next day we'd return to find the snared rabbits. Jack was rough but kind. The rabbits alive in the snare would get a quick dispatch with his strong hands. He’d say “go on, you know where thay snares be” He would order me to go on ahead, a little way out of his sight, I was unsure and nervous and he'd call out to me, “Go on, I told ee you know where thay snares be.” He was perhaps trying to toughen this kid from Plumstead, London into knowing the ways of a country man. The mushrooms were so abundant in the 40s that when he took me into the hills above Burton Bradstock, Jack would say to me “only pick they middle size mushrooms, not they big orse (horse) ones and leave thay tiny button ones”.

Mark, bottom right corner, at Victory Party 1945 at Burton Bradstock Primary school hall celebrating the end of WWII.

Another remembrance I have, was one morning I’m up in the cab of that old lorry of Jack's and were going to one of his farmer friends orchard to collect windfall apples. So mum and Mrs Thorner waved us off. We took the narrow country lane which forked away from the direction of Beach Road. It was in this lane where previously Jack had

shown me the sides of the unspoiled ditches all covered in primroses. He would challenge me to find a cowslip amongst them and it thrilled me when I found one, yes cowslips, where did they all go! So, as we were driving along this same lane on a trip to collect windfall apples, Jack suddenly stopped, left the driving seat and opening my door he helped me down. I recall we walked a fair way into the land along a narrow path to witness a sight and a fragrance that has remained with me to this day. There before us in a low glade, the morning mist was raising in clouds and below the dense mist one contrasting vast mass of blue bluebells. I'll never forget that sight or aroma in that little place of heaven. It was fenced and I was unaware of the electric wire along the fence because I touched it and remember how Jack chastised me for making such a fuss. "That didn'ee hurt thee." Returning to the truck, we went and collected the windfall apples. The farmer and his family were kind to me and I was told that the apples were of a variety which had died out from a bye gone era. The apples were a bit scabby with a whitish skin but were very tasty. Sadly Jack Thorner died before I could tell him of how much and how grateful I am about those wonderful experiences that I had shared with him. I'll remember them all my life.

As an evacuee, I found myself in Burton Bradstock's primary school. One day, out of the blue, I was accused of stealing a brooch. My little accuser is a girl called Betty who I understand was also an evacuee. Initially, I thought it's a game they were playing on me but when the whole class said they had seen me with a brooch and they all turned on me and the interrogation lasted a couple of days. The class mistress resembled "Old mother Reilly" perhaps she had nicked the brooch, if in fact there ever was one. Anyway, I was completely innocent. Perhaps Betty had lost one of her mother's brooches and made up the whole story. Or even old mother Reilly, her name was, I think, Miss Body I remember her as she indicated that I was the culprit. In the end however, I still remained popular with my class mates. The final days in Burton saw the Wars end. President Roosevelt died and Brother John, mum and I, along with the Thorner's our neighbours looked into the skies to see the returning bombers, some with holes visible in their wings.

Mark learning to be a tap dancer, an evacuee, Burton Bradstock, WWII.

During our stay there, a local land owner, a wealthy lady and dignitary who was a Catholic, would regularly every Sunday morning pick us up outside our cottage. Her car was a Lanchester fluid flywheel and was chauffeur driven to take us to mass in Bridport which was six miles away. Mum, cousin Patsy (who was a nurse) John, and I would often walk there to shop. Patsy took me there once, to a cinema where they were showing the Concentration camps which had only just recently been liberated. For many weeks after that experience, it affected me.

Bridport was also where mum enrolled me into a dance school, to learn tap dancing. Yes, I believe mum having had a deprived childhood wanted me to learn something she had wanted to do. She admired some of the greats of the silver screen "Anna Neagle, Michael Wilding, Dick Powell, Ruby Keeler" and her real favourite "James Cagney". I was the only boy in the tap dance class amongst all the girls and at my tender age, Oh the humiliation! However, later in life I did sing in a dance band and did impressions of all time great Al' Jolson. I was invited to Hollywood to perform by Forrest J. Ackerman who incidentally knew Al' Jolson personally. My story ends without mention of my brother Colin, author of "Common Folk" Vol 1 & 2. who was only about six months old up until he was a year old as an evacuee and of my dear sister Ann who was born in 1947, who both now live in New Zealand.

God bless you Mum and Dad ----------and yes Jack Thorner and family too.....

Dad and mum, Mark, on table, and John, on lap c.1940ish.

Colin aged 6 months on evacuation. Bridport studio photographers.

Over 60 Years In Plumstead

Linda Gilder (nee Joyce)

I have lived in Plumstead for all but two of my nearly 61 years! Yes, it has changed, but I have a great affection for the ol' place and its people.

I was born to Ethna and Ron Joyce (the best parents you could ever wish for) in 1949 in the British Home for Mothers & Babies at the bottom of Prospect Vale, near Thorogood's the butcher that was owned by my great aunt Elsie and her husband Reg Thorogood.

I went home to Thornhill Avenue, Plumstead, where mum, dad and I lived with my nan & granddad, Grace and Bill Joyce and my aunt Miriam, known as Babs. Opposite, lived my great aunt Win and great uncle Alf Carr, with my aunt Mary & uncle Alan, cousins Alan and later Christine. We were a very close family, and thankfully we still are.

When I was six mum, dad and I moved to Bassant Road, just round the corner so we always lived close to my grandparents. My mum's parents, Alice & Pat Keys, lived in Ingledew Road and every Saturday afternoon mum and I would take the walk down Lakedale Road to spend time with them and my aunt Molly, uncle Alec and cousins Angela, Edward, Ethna and Stephen who lived next door.

Our houses in Thornhill Ave and Bassant Road had bathrooms. My aunt Molly's did not. It had a scullery and an outside toilet. My nan & granddad Keys' house didn't even have hot water. They had just one tap, running cold water. Anyway, I loved staying at aunt Molly's as it meant having a bath in front of the fire in the tin bath brought in from the back yard! How contrary can you get?

Saturday afternoons had a regular pattern. Mum, aunt Molly, my cousins and I used to go "down the lane" (Lakedale Road), go to Morgan's for the cold meats etc., to the shop which sold broken biscuits…..but the highlight was to go to Plumstead Library. The children's' library was set at the back of the building and I could have spent hours there, choosing my books. I also remember using the mobile library that used to stop in Ancaster Street, at the top of Thornhill Avenue. It's no wonder that for most of my working life, I worked in the library of our local college of further education! ▪

We used to leave my nan and granddad's in time for us to walk up Lakedale Road and get home for me to take down the football results, so my dad could check to see if we'd won the pools when he got home. We never did.

He used to work as a barber at weekends at John's, Vincent Road, Woolwich. During the week he worked at Siemens in the Cable Shop. He used to go to work by bike, at one time using his sister Babs's bike. He got stopped by the police as it was a girls' bike and they suspected he'd stolen it. At fourteen, my dad was apprenticed to Charlie Sturgess, a barber in Bird's Nest Hollow. When he went into the Navy, he continued to cut hair; when he came out of the Navy and worked in Siemens, he continued to cut hair. Finally, in 1963, he got his own shop, Ronald's Ladies & Gents' Hairdressers, in Brewery Road. He and my mum ran it for twenty years, until they retired in 1983.

The Hairdressers shop, Brewery Road.

As a little girl, I remember my granddad Joyce taking me to "The Rock Gardens", or to give them their proper name, "Rockliffe Gardens". I loved it there. As you walked in there was the little round pond, where I used to delight in leaning over the brick wall to peer at the lily pads. A little further on was the long, rectangular pond and I used to walk round it on the low brick wall. A walk down the windy path led you to the lake at the bottom and best of all, the stepping stones which I used to walk over again, again…and again. I remember the little bridge under which flowed a tiny stream and there was a little waterfall. As a little girl, for me the Rock Gardens were magical. It is such a pity that the children in the area today can't enjoy them in the same way.

Either on the way there, or on the way home, we'd call into Morgan's, at the corner of Swingate Lane and Camdale Road. Half the shop was a sweet shop and the other half was a florist. Mrs Morgan made my wedding bouquet. Morgan's always smelt the same, a mixture of confectionery and flowers. I loved it. I always had the same thing…a Tub, to be eaten with a little wooden spoon.

My granddad also took me "tiddling" in Danson Park, Welling. I loved trying to catch the tiddlers in the lake there and then bring them home in my jam jar!

One walk my granddad took me on was to Bostall Woods, which meant walking down King's Highway, past the bus garage. I absolutely hated the bus garage. I was terrified of it and would not look into the wide open doors as we walked past. I used to turn my head to look over the other side of the road, and not look ahead until we were well past it. In fact, as a very little girl, I hated buses.

Westbrook – Me on the right - note the knitted swimming costume, as it got wet and made its way down to your knees!

The 126 bus used to start at The Woodman pub, go down the Slade, turn into Timbercroft Lane and run down Thornhill Avenue,

stopping nearly outside our house. When my mum realised I'd developed an irrational fear of buses, she arranged with one of the conductors that she'd take me on his bus at the same time every day, to make the short trip from The Woodman to Thornhill Avenue. She explained that I'd scream and cried, but that he was to ignore me and finally I would stop. She was right. I screamed and cried for a few days and then gradually stopped! Good job really, as I've never learned to drive and depend heavily on the buses nowadays.

Holidays were spent at Westbrook, just outside of Margate, for one week every year….and I loved it. I still love Westbrook; we took our own children there for holidays when they were young and although the place is now a shadow of what it was, I take my grandchildren there for visits.

I went to Timbercroft School where the Headteacher was Miss Davis. Some of the teachers I remember are, Mr Lambshire, Mr Monk, Mrs Farley, Mr Seabrook, Mrs Lapage and Miss Kingdom. When I was seven I was diagnosed with asthma. I didn't know anyone else with asthma and I don't remember anyone else at school having it. It is so much more common today.

Form 2A – Mr Seabrook's class, around 1956/7?

Form 3A – Mrs Farley's class – around 1957/8?

I managed to pass the eleven plus and went to King's Warren, aka The Brown School, where I had to work very hard to stay in the middle. I was never top, never bottom, just an average student. I was happy there and made true and lasting friendships.

I was never great at sport. I never got to the top of the wall bars and my attempts to get across the horse/box in one leap were laughable. I never knew where to stand when we were playing netball and as for lacrosse – I can still hear the games mistress shouting "cradle, cradle" as I ran holding the lacrosse stick aloft, desperately trying to keep the ball in the net, hoist it over my shoulder and lob it at some poor girl further up the field, hoping she'd catch it in her net!! Tennis? My friend Shirl and I used to lower the net, in the hope we'd get the ball over at least once!

I remember my mum taking me to Cuffs in Woolwich for my school uniform. The gabardine mac, the blazer, beret, skirt, blouses, tie, summer dresses, cardigans, indoor and outdoor shoes, shoulder purse, gym shirt and skirt and …. the dreaded brown knickers! You HAD to wear the beret and once you hit the 6th form, you could report any girl you saw on her way to or from school if she was not wearing her beret!

I used to love Cuffs, a lot more than Garratt's. Cuffs always seemed brighter to me. I loved the system they used to send the money to the accounts department, putting the money in the little tube and sending it on its way, winding round the store till it reached its destination. I can hear the sound it made to this day. I can remember the house/brand name that Cuffs used – Czarina! I think I still have sheets with that name on the label. They were made to last ▪

As a treat, my mum would take me to either Lyons Corner House, in Powis Street, Woolwich, or to another place to eat and I can't remember the name of it, but back then I thought it was 'posh'. I remember the seats being made of leather and there were metal studs all the way round the back. I can remember eating in the Co-op restaurant at the bottom of Powis Street, where they had silver service.

We rarely went out during the evening other than to visit relatives, occasionally for family parties. My granddad Keys used to conduct us all in singing 'My Grandfather's Clock'. He used to stand in front of us, produce a comb from his top pocket and we'd have to watch carefully to know when to start singing. We'd all have our own songs to sing, mine was 'Scarlet Ribbons', a song I now sing to my grandchildren.

We sometimes went to the cinema and I do remember occasionally going to The Radical Club on Plumstead Bridge, where my nan and granddad Keys used to go. They had a Ladies Room; I think it was called The Oak Room, where the women could sit, have a drink and chat to other women. They were not allowed in the regular bar with the men. Upstairs was a dance hall, which is where my dad first saw my mum dancing the jitterbug, when he was home on leave from the Navy. A local newsagent/sweetshop owner, Mr Dimond, who had a newsagents in Swingate Lane, used to play the piano in the 'house band'.

Beside the Radical Club was The Lord Derby, which has recently closed. In my late teens, I remember a few of us singing in the Derby, accompanied by Ada Last on the piano 'Heart of my Heart', 'On Mother Kelly's Doorstep', 'Salome'…..yes, we were sixties kids, going to see 'The Beatles' and many others at the Woolwich Granada and 'The Rolling Stones' at Greenwich Town Hall, but we'd been brought up on the old songs!

As teenagers, we used to go to The Inferno (a little hut along the station approach in Welling). I remember the first time we went there, we walked through the doors and 'The Kinks' "You Really Got Me" was playing, loud and clear – to a fourteen year old it was just thrilling. We went to The Black Cat, round the corner from Woolwich Arsenal Station, where you'd see live bands. There was a coffee bar around Green's End in Woolwich and The Twisted Wheel was a coffee bar in Bellegrove Road, Welling. We went to see live bands at Burton's, opposite Eltham Church in Eltham, the Welcome Inn in Eltham, the Shakespeare Hotel in Powis Street, Woolwich. We went on to The Witchdoctor, later to be The Savoy at

Catford, to the all-nighters at the Lyceum in The Strand, to Middle Earth in Covent Garden, to see live bands at the London College of Printing. It was a fabulous time.

The Black Cat on the far right – note the Mods with their scooters outside.

Our family doctors were in Kirkham Street, Dr Marr and Dr Horton. I vividly remember the waiting room. There was the small table in the middle with the magazines, the chairs all round the wall and Dr Horton in the next room with the door with the frosted glass windows. I'm still in touch with Dr Horton and am planning to visit her very soon. She was also my children's doctor for a while before she retired and when I was particularly worried about one of them, I rang her and she was at my door in 10 minutes. Today's young mums can only dream of a service like that.

As I said, when I started writing this, I've lived in Plumstead for all but two of my nearly 61 years. I can't really imagine living anywhere else. How sad is that?

Pearce Family

Derek Boswell

Pearce family at Violet's wedding 1936. The bride Violet Pearce aged 21, sitting on left of youngest daughter, Dorothy Pearce aged 19 chief bridesmaid holding flowers. Derek Boswell is in mothers arms and a page boy behind Violet.

It will be noted that Sam Pearce the patriarch of the family is not in the photograph. I have no idea where he might be. He was alive at that time and in fact survived until October 1944, where he died whilst living in Devon to escape the doodlebugs or V1s.

The Ford car you see standing outside the Pearce home belonged to Harry Ellis who must have been visiting when the picture was taken. The white single storey attached building to the right hand side would have been disused at this time, but it was originally built by Sam Pearce as a business venture and run as a very

successful fried fish and chip shop on his behalf, by a Fred Mulley, who I believe, lived in Glyndon Road.

Old man Pearce, Henry, or Sam as he preferred, wasn't too keen on working for anyone else, as he had done in his early days. He hailed from Fishponds in Bristol and followed in his fathers footsteps, becoming a trained butcher. He started the family greengrocery business at 77 Villas Road and also a coal business, which became better known in later years when it was run by his son 'Alf'. He used to say that only fools and horses worked, and in his case it appeared to be his sons who worked for him. He had a very Victorian attitude to women going out to work, but he made sure it was his daughters who worked in the greengrocery shop for him. He hated debt and always preferred to deal in cash, to such a degree, where he was sometimes called 'Sam Cash' in the greengrocery markets.

By the time he died, he had become enormously fat. He had an extra wide carver type chair made for him in his later years, and when he died his coffin, which was a polished elm affair, was too wide to be lowered into the grave in the new Woolwich cemetery. It had to be left beside the grave until after the graveside internment service and was later buried after the mourners had left and the grave enlarged.

His son Alf became well known in Plumstead. Alf had a coal delivery business and did street deliveries of coal, making up such sayings for his customers as 'these are the coals of the bold AP the finest coalman you ever did see, the workers friend, the coalmans enemy! He was quite a character.

Sams youngest son 'Les' became better known in Blackfen Sidcup, where he built up a successful greengrocery and furniture shop trade and a removal business with the slogan 'anywhere with every care'

Bill, his second son, worked up a successful greengrocery round, especially in the Eltham area, and then later, when the Pearce shop closed and became the removal office, his wife and his son Stan carried on successfully from a yard in Glyndon Road, a short way along from the Villas Road address. Bill having died in 1947 after a short illness.

Of his daughters, so far as I am aware, only his second eldest Daughter 'Florence', my mother, ever seriously worked, making tennis balls in the Slazenger factory which was then situated in Woolwich.

Playing Hookey

Written on behalf of Gordon Scott by Bognor Library.

I was 12 years old in 1944. My birthday was 4th July. The weekend before D-day, my friends and I had been out on our bikes. We lived in Welling, Kent and all the country lanes were full of army vehicles. We worked out that D-Day was imminent. We talked to the soldiers, but they didn't seem to know what was happening or when.

The following week, I played hookey from school and I went down to Woolwich to have a look at the King George V docks because I knew that the invasion fleet would be moored there. I went on the Woolwich free ferry across to the Docks, but the ferry was stopped for some large tugs towing what looked like a large concrete block – about 4 or 5 storeys high. Everybody on the ferry had different ideas what it was – I was listening to the other people – was it a fort to be put in the middle of the Thames? Nobody really had a clue! It wasn't until a few days after D-Day that I realised what I had seen was part of Mulberry Harbour – probably from a newsreel in the cinema. Possibly the pier head that had been built at Deptford.

About a month later, I was evacuated to Yorkshire because the doodle bug attacks intensified after D-Day. We were put on a train at King's Cross with no idea of where we were going. I ended up in Cleckheaton – a small mill town. I was asked if I had any preference where I wanted to go – I asked to go to a farm. There was only one farm on the list, but the farmer wanted a girl! When we arrived at the door, Mrs Crossland the farmers wife, said to the WRVS that she really wanted a young girl – but the WRVS ladies said that I was all they had left – rather like the last cake on the shelf!

I did enjoy my time there (11 months in all), but I didn't like potato picking! Many of the evacuees ran away and tried to make their way back home after a few weeks, but I stayed and returned for a visit about 5 years ago. The farm house was still there, but the fields have been turned into a very upmarket estate of houses.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

Woolwich Free ferry. Old approach with vehicle and foot ramps.

Plumstead Common Shops

Christopher Martyn

The nearest shops to where I lived in St John's Terrace were those in 'the Hollow', the stretch of Plumstead Common Road that ran down from the Links, past shops on both sides, and then rose to the Globe cinema. My favourite was probably Brookmoore's. This was primarily a sweet shop but it sold stationery and Fullers cakes, and it also had its own subscription library, like the ones you came across in Boots at the seaside. The lady behind the counter wore rimless glasses, which used to fascinate me; my dad called them Glen Miller glasses. In the same row of shops was Dalladay's the boot-menders, with its sharp tang of leather and metal and the din of whirring machinery. Mr D and his assistant wore aprons and had hands that were blackened by their work. To claim your repaired shoes you gave in a fragment of thick paper that had a serial number on it and an indecipherable scrawl that represented the day for collection. Doreen Pearce – who also sang alto in St Margaret's Church Choir - kept a sweet shop a bit higher up, and across the gated entrance beside her shop was Claude Baker's toyshop and tobacconists.

The hours I must have spent gazing at Claude's carefully constructed window displays, hankering after the latest Matchbox toy or Hornby accessory. Among many other things, the present my parents gave me for passing the eleven-plus came from there; a Dinky tank transporter and tank in their long sturdy cardboard box. When you bought a toy that had wheels, Claude used to oil the axles for you: a thoughtful gesture, but the little vehicle would give off a fishy smell for weeks afterwards. I bought packets of assorted stamps from there to swell my stamp collection, and my mum and dad went there for their cigarettes: Senior Service and Airman respectively, I think. When Claude went to the Isle of Man every year to watch the TT races the shop was looked after by his wife. This wonderful shop finally closed in 1996, two years after her husband's death and by which time Lillian herself had reached the age of 79. * *Please see footnote.*

Next to Mr Baker's was the café, run by the eccentric Scottish sisters, Molly and Betty Waterman. Everywhere inside was swathed in tartan, and they served a mean drop-scone. The business came to an abrupt end, sadly, when the shop caught fire and Molly lost her life.

Next to the café was the butcher's shop run by my granddad's bowls-playing chum, Archie Reed. We always got our weekend joint from there. The shop had all the sounds, sights and smells you associate with the meat trade; the well-worn butcher's block; the swish of knives being sharpened; the thud of a cleaver parting bone; the sweet fragrance of fresh sawdust on the floor mingled with the coppery reek of blood. The door to the cold store closed with a satisfying ker-thunk. There were sticky yellow strips of fly-paper hanging from the ceiling, and propped outside, by the side entrance, would be the delivery boy's bike with its diminutive front wheel topped by a square frame to hold the wicker basket.

On the corner, facing the Tardis-style police telephone box, was the Ship Inn pub. I used to like taking a (very) short cut through the beer garden at the front, weaving in and out of the archways of its rustic fence. On a warm day, a distinctive beery smell wafted through the open doors; as I peered nervously into the gloomy interior I could just make out the dark

polished wood, brass and mirrors. In those days, children were not allowed in pubs under any circumstances. Beside the pub stood the news vendor shouting, “Star, News 'n Standard.” In those days London had three evening papers; now it has just the *Standard* and that is a 'freebie'.

The police phone box and the Links Shops c.l949.

The RACS shops at the Links, (called Acacia Parade in early photographs of the Common) were a regular haunt, notably the chemists and the grocery. I remember going upstairs with my mum to collect the dividend, when you exchanged the flimsy, metal tokens given out with your purchases at Co-op shops for real money. Many years later, when she worked at the Head Office of the RACS in Woolwich, mum used to be sent out every six months to help pay out the ‘divvy’ in one of the Society’s many branches. She used to enjoy a day out, seeing places she might otherwise never go to, especially as the RACS bought up small societies right across the south-east corner of England. This could mean a coach trip into deepest Surrey or Kent. I used to play with those Co-op tokens; they were a good substitute for coins of the realm, but their sharp edges made them ever so slightly hazardous to handle.

Down in the Hollow itself, I recall the newsagents, run by Eddie Sales. It was a tiny premises, barely one pace from the door to the counter, which ran right across the shop. I loved the smell of fresh newsprint, and liked to watch Eddie or his wife – as often as not with a fag in the corner of the mouth – rummaging through the thick binder which contained a page for every customer who had papers delivered, looking for our address. Even now, in this computerised day and age, newsagents still have perforated pages from which they tear out your receipt, though they are not as tiny as they were then.

In the same row of shops there was a butcher’s with a partitioned-off pay desk. Archie didn’t have one of those and I thought it rather unnecessary, but I later realised that it was in fact more hygienic if the people that handled the meat did not touch the coins or 10/- and £1

notes. The baker's next door was where we got our bread. I remember queuing in the shop doorway as the delivery man squeezed past shouting, "Mind your backs, please!" My back wasn't high enough to be in the way of the wide wooden tray he was carrying, but I would still flatten myself against the door-frame; you did as you were told as a kid. And on the corner was Delroy's, which was the first local self-service grocery shop we had. There were only two aisles, one up and one down, but this place was definitely a sign of things to come; a true 'convenience' store. We occasionally took the 54 bus to Lewisham and treated ourselves to a visit to Sainsbury's. The sheer size of that place, its light and airy interior, its cream-coloured wall-tiles and the long shelves piled with stuff you didn't see anywhere else, were impressive.

Across Blendon Terrace was a Post Office, where I would sometimes deposit left-over pocket money into the savings account which had been opened for me by my two sets of grandparents just days after I was born. They had paid in five shillings each, a fair sum in 1945, I guess. On the cover of your PO Savings Book was stamped the name of the branch where the account was opened; in my case this was Wednesfield in what was then Staffordshire, now the West Midlands. My mother had been 'evacuated' from Plumstead during the war, in good time for my birth, as her parents' home in Ancona Road – little more than a stone's throw from the Arsenal - was deemed too risky a place to be in during the closing months of 1944. Cousin Rae lived in Penn, another, and far more salubrious, part of Wolverhampton, and so the family were based there. Granddad was able to watch Wolves play at home, presumably a fair swap for following the fortunes of the Addicks at the Valley. I should add that I sometimes used the Post Office on Warwick Terrace, on the end of the row with Peter B Morris, the dentist and a gents' hairdressers. My dad and I visited both of these establishments. Unlike most children, I loved the dentists and hated the hairdressers. Mr Morris was friendly, good-natured and softly-spoken; he and his kindly nurse were brilliant at putting you at your ease. On the other hand, men who cut your hair were generally rough and short-tempered with fidgety boys.

Just up from the Blendon Terrace, before you found yourself looking across the Common to the Bandstand, were John Singleton's and the Globe. John was a photographer who did weddings and portraits. I only went there once, to have a passport-sized photo taken for my application to University College, London, when I was 18. In those days photo-booths in shops were rare and usually only seen in seaside towns. UCL turned me down after a disastrous interview, but fortunately their sister college, Queen Mary, offered me a place and I had three great years there.

I never ever went into the Globe cinema. Mum and dad simply forbade it. They were like the adults in Stephen Spender's poem, "My parents kept me from children who were rough." They regarded Saturday morning pictures as the haunt of oiks and undesirables, and the cinema itself as a flea-pit. I was taken to the Odeon and the Granada in Woolwich fairly often, so I never felt particularly deprived.

On the other side of the Hollow I remember Ludlam's the grocers, with its humming meat-slicer and sides of bacon hanging from the ceiling. In the days of rationing, Mr Ludlam cut the coupons out of your Ration Book with a pair of scissors he kept tied to the counter by a length of string and placed them in a red-painted Oxo tin. A few doors along was Gentry's

the greengrocers. I liked to watch as Mr G carefully wrote on the big window of his shop the details of today's attractions. He used a fine brush and what looked like white paint, though it must have been some kind of wash. On the other corner of Admaston Road was the ironmongers, with its characteristic smell of Brillo pads, thickly bristled broom-heads and what not. I was always fascinated by the row of thick-glassed acid batteries (accumulators) standing on the floor in front of the counter, with their red and black terminals. We had no need of such a source of electricity in our house, and to this day I haven't a clue how people used them.

Up the hill towards the Star Inn and the petrol filling station you passed Ann's Café, Dodson's the butchers (I knew John Dodson from the Scouts and St Margaret's Choir), Gibbs the chemists, with its smooth mahogany counters, cupboards and drawers and brass fittings, and Betts the wet fishmongers. Mr B habitually wore wellington boots and a white ankle-length waterproof apron. He had shiny black Brylcreamed hair. On Fridays and Saturdays he would open up his fish-frying business, situated round the side of the shop in Jago Close. We didn't have fish and chips very often, but it was a real treat when we did. My mum declined to buy our Smiths potato crisps from Betts' however, because she reckoned they got soggy in the unavoidably damp atmosphere of the shop, and even the salt stuck to the inside of the blue paper twist nestling at the bottom of the bag.

I return to Plumstead so infrequently these days that I cannot give a reliable update on what shops and pubs are there and which are not. Some of the shops will almost certainly have been turned into private dwellings, a trend you see all over England and Wales. But The Links is still there, with its distinctively modelled clock tower, and buses to Woolwich and beyond still draw up outside. The Star Inn is currently marked on Google Earth, as is a Delroy's Store. I hope my recollections are more or less accurate. Kipling said, "Some women stay in a man's memory if they once walked down a street." If you walk up and down Plumstead Common Road as often as I did in the 50s and 60s, there's a fair chance the shops will stay in the memory too.

See **'Our Common Story' (Plumstead Common Environment Group, 2nd edition, 2004) where you will find Lillian Baker's account of how their business began and developed.*

*See also **'Common Folk',** Volume Two, and read the story, 'Reminiscences Of Lillian Baker'.*

Plumstead Memories

Roy Goodhew

I lived with my mother and sister; my father was in the army so I had no memory at all of him since I was born, at St Nicholas Hospital, Plumstead, in February 1939 and he was called up for war service in November of that year. He never once was allowed home for the whole duration of the war; he was initially posted somewhere up north an then to France. His journey by train to France, via Dover, took him through Plumstead, passing our house by only about 150 yards; he said it really got to him passing so close but not being able to see us. When my father was eventually demobbed and returned home he was a complete stranger to me; my mother told me that I told to him to get out as soon as he walked through the door.

My mother worked in the Arsenal assembling munitions to supplement the frugal allowance paid by the army. Since she did not finish work until 6pm, Conway Road School arranged for us children with working parents to stay to 'Tea' as it was called then. The tea consisted of a large slice of bread layered with dripping and a hot drink. I have tried bread and dripping since but it never tasted as good as that provided by the school.

My mother opted for us as a family to be evacuated in the early part of the war, mainly because we lived so close to the Arsenal, a prize target for the Germans. We were sent up to Nottingham with many other families from the neighbourhood. On arrival at Nottingham we were initially accommodated in the pavilion attached to Nottingham County Cricket Club, we were provided with a meal. The whole place was overcrowded but we had to stay there until more permanent accommodation could be found. That night, us and several other families were allocated the floor of the gents toilets to sleep on, which, by necessity, we did. We were eventually billeted with an elderly couple who had a small two bedroom house. We had one of the bedrooms with just a double bed which the three of us slept in. We were not welcome in any other part of the house and my mother, many years later, told me that she was at her wits end trying to keep us kids amused and occupied so we ended up wandering around the streets of Nottingham all day. I contracted diphtheria whilst there and ended up in an isolation hospital in West Bridgeford. Fortunately for me, I had been vaccinated and managed to survive it, but I remember a girl dying in the next isolated room to me. I used to communicate to her by waving my arms but as the days passed she grew too weak to sit up. When I was finally discharged, my mother had treated me to a new pair of shoes but on wearing them my mother said I was still so weak I had great difficulty in walking. Because of the unfriendliness of the people we were staying with, my mother arranged for us to return to Plumstead and take our chances there. My mother always maintained that my diphtheria was brought on by the unsanitary conditions we slept in whilst at the cricket club but that I shall never know.

Up until 1950 we lived in Lenton Street, opposite the Arsenal No 3 gate. The Royal Arsenal had four main gates, No 1 gate being in Beresford Square. My earliest recollections of Plumstead were firstly the smell of the polluted River Thames, especially at low tide when the sludge in the river was exposed to the hot summer sun; it really stank and relief only

came when the tide rose over it once again.

As a child, I remember during the darkened early winter evenings how the sky over Plumstead would glow bright red briefly and then darken again followed shortly afterwards by another even brighter red glow for a slightly longer period. This strange lighting effect was due to the Ford motor works, several miles down the river on the opposite bank of the Thames at Dagenham, tapping into their huge blast furnace to run off the molten steel used in their car production.

I don't think people in Plumstead nowadays would have any idea of what the area around Plumstead High Street and Woolwich was like when, at 6pm, the workforce of several thousands of people left the Arsenal to go home.

During the severely cold winter of 1947, I remember walking to Conway Road School in at least 12 inches of snow (I loved every minute of it, snow was a rare treat in Plumstead). I used to go to school early as I had a very important job, at least I thought it was important; I was a milk monitor, paid 1 penny a day by Miss Nichol's who's job, apart from teaching, was to make sure the milk was distributed around the school. This particular morning the milk had frozen in the bottles and risen an inch or so above the rims with the foil caps sitting on top, it looked really funny.

Keeping warm at home during that winter of 1947 was a real problem, coal had run short as the coal companies were unable to get their supplies and even if they did they were unable to deliver it; road gritting was unheard of in those days. One morning as I was going to school during that cold spell, I noticed that people, in desperation, had removed hundreds of the tarred wooden blocks from between the tram lines along Plumstead High Street during the night to burn on their fires at home. (My dad said they would burn for quite a while, especially with the tar topping on them) Today, a wooden road surface would seem strange but wood was used to allow the tram tracks to expand and contract.

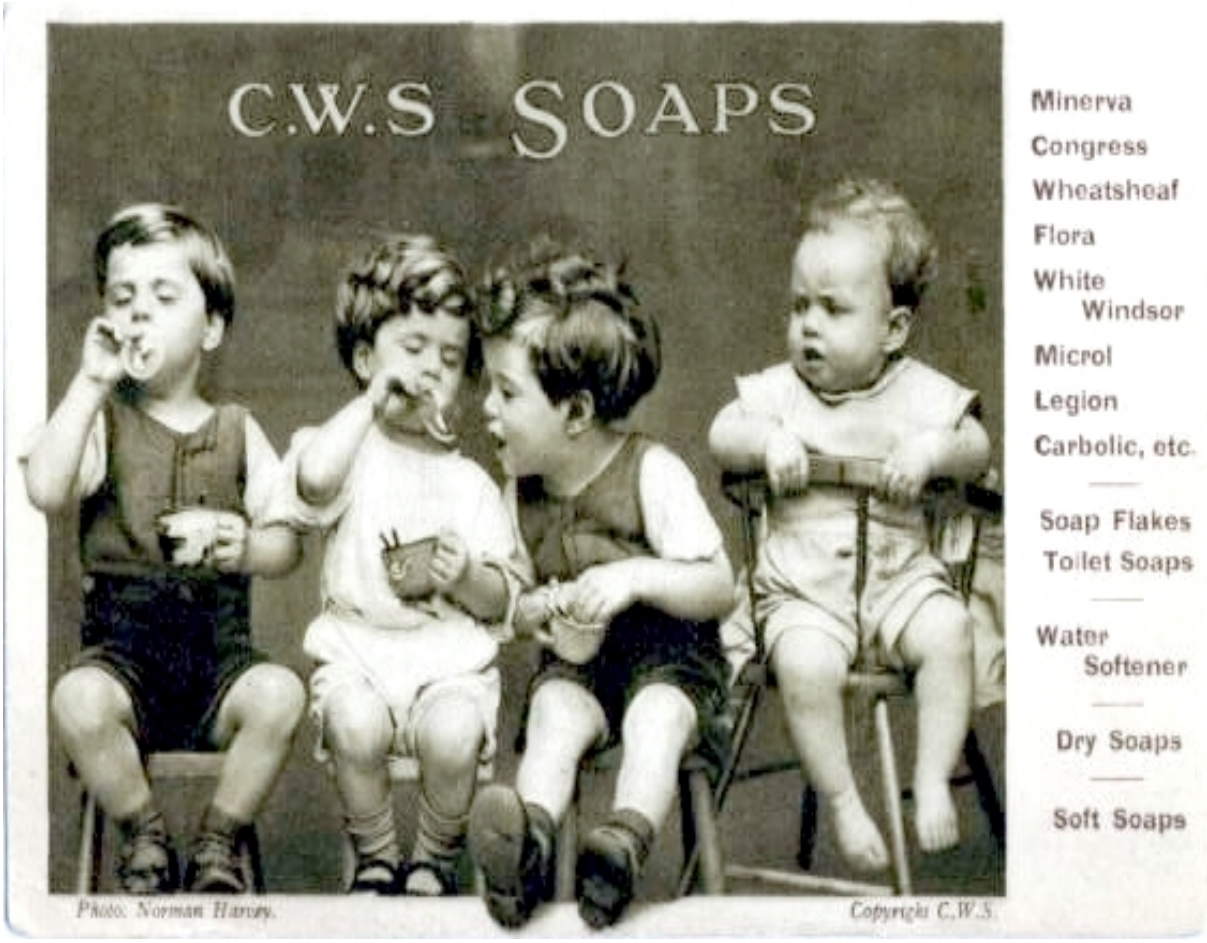
On a trip through Plumstead a year or so ago, I was very surprised to see 'YORKIES' cafe still trading, near Plumstead rail bridge. Yorkie, as we called him, came to Britain in about 1946 to open up his cafe and would always have a laugh and joke with us children as we passed by.

During the war and while the blackout was in force, whilst crossing the road I was knocked down by a fire engine from Lakedale Road Fire Station. It was speeding to a fire in a garage in Burrage Road. A friend of the family offered to take me to the 'Cinema' in Beresford Square together with his son; this was in the early part of 1945. On returning home by tram we got off one stop sooner than than we should have, the stop was opposite Ann street. I tried telling the friend that the stop for my house was the next one but he disagreed. I must have panicked a bit as I remember running around the rear of the tram, it was very dark as the blackout was in force and I just ran across the the road. I heard the clanging of the fire engine's bell but did not see the fire engine bearing down on me; they were very poorly lit in the front with hooded lights. Luckily for me, I ended up under the middle of the tender and not under the wheels. I vividly remember a fireman peering under the tender and saying he's still alive! Due to the heavy demands placed on the ambulance service, I could not be taken to hospital and was taken into a nearby house and cared for until, eventually, I was taken to

St Nicholas Hospital. I did, however, make the front page of the then Kentish Independent newspaper. Many years later and long after we moved, my sister met and married the son of the family whose house I was taken into, what a coincidence.

Plumstead High street seemed to me to be one continuous row of shops, cafés and pubs from Beresford Square to almost the start of Wickham Lane. I really enjoyed growing up in Plumstead and look back on my life there with great pleasure.

2010



Plumstead Stories From Milly Sheppard

on behalf of her son Bob

31 Barth Road where I was born.

I lived firstly at lower Plumstead for about six years and I was born at 31 Barth Road in 1926.

My family moved elsewhere for a time, moving back again to the Woolwich Borough and to Plumstead Common in 1938,.

As I was very young when living in lower Plumstead, I only have vague memories of the area because we moved away to Barking Essex when I was six years of age.

However, I was aware of the old St Nicholas Hospital across Plumstead High Street, the local shopping centre at Lakedale Road, and the fire station there, and my mother taking me on the tram to Woolwich for greengrocery shopping from the open market in Beresford Square.

All along Plumstead Road on the right was a high brick wall, the boundary of the Royal Arsenal ordnance factory, with a middle gate situated opposite the Plumstead railway station and the main gate to Beresford Square. (Workers had to show their passes to gain admittance).

A pause of a few minutes was a *must* as a child, to let me watch the tram conductors at the terminal as they changed the source of the trams' power, by disconnecting the overhead poles and inserting some sort of underground electrical conductor underneath the trams, before they continued on their way to Charlton where, apparently, no overhead power was available.

Another point of interest was the Woolwich Free Ferry that plied between the approach at Hare Street Woolwich and across the Thames to North Woolwich.

There was also a foot tunnel about one and a quarter miles long with many more steps to climb at the Kentish side, if one missed the lift.

After living away from the Woolwich Borough for six years, we moved back in 1938, this time, to Plumstead Common at 145 Plumstead Common Road in the part known locally as 'Birds' Nest Hollow'.

Facing our house was the opening of Palmerston Crescent with Cox's Hardware store on the corner. (Mr. Cox owned our house). Opposite also, were one or two other shops, including a cooked meat shop, Reid's fish and chip shop, and an Alderton's bakery shop. On our side of the road, going westward, were one or two houses with basements, one of which housed a small shoe mending workshop (a sign outside declared it was "Alwright for shoe repairs"), a newsagents, post office, and Chadwell's bakery.

On the corner of a small part of the Common and Blendon Terrace was an old shut down cinema called 'the Globe'. We had occasion to be pleased when this was renovated and opened up again during the war, needed because of the loss of some cinemas due to the bombing. It was handy for us being so close to home and eliminating the necessity of taking the bus ride to the Woolwich cinemas.

I attended the Woolwich Central School for Girls at Bloomfield Road, a typical old school built in the Victorian era. The ground floor level was an infants' school, the first floor was our school, and the top floor was the Woolwich Central School for Boys. No luxurious playing fields for us, just a tarmacked area marked out for netball, a shelter shed and basic toilets. This simple playground was shared by all, but we were segregated from the boys by a high brick wall. That we were cramped for space was very evident. The use of a spare room in the infants' school was granted to our school for our French lessons. Another school building fronting Sandy Hill Road was in use for our art classes, and we walked crocodile style across Burrage Road to an old house somewhere, for our domestic science lessons.

With excitement, we learnt the L.C.C. (London City Council) planned to build us a new modern school. There were even rumours it would contain a swimming pool! The old terraced houses around the school were emptied in readiness for this, and a block of flats was built in Barnfield Road to accommodate the displaced people. Of course, the event of the second war killed this wonderful plan stone dead. These old houses soon filled up again after the bombing.

Along this part of Plumstead Common Road were some very grand old houses, one of which was owned by Mr Mullins, the chimney sweep. In the 1960's, this house was converted into flats and my twice widowed mother spent the last year or two of her life occupying one. (She wrote me that she could see my old school from her back window).

Plumstead Common Road terminated where Brookhill Road joined it on the right; then it was named Nightingale Place, which carried on to Woolwich Common near to the historic Wellington barracks. In Nightingale Place stood a grand old house with a plaque attached to the wall. I took little notice of this then, but now I wonder if it was one of the training centres for Florence Nightingale nurses at one time?

Opposite the Globe cinema, Plum Lane took a steep climb to Shrewsbury Park at the summit. One could study superb views of the Thames from a telescope mounted there, costing about one penny for about ten minutes viewing. Naturally this was removed at the commencement of the war.

At this time a barrage balloon was situated in the park.

Plum Lane led on to Shrewsbury Lane and eventually Shooter's Hill.

From our house, going east passing a few more small shops and 'The Star' public house on the right, I would go on roller skates to do some grocery shopping for my mother at the Co-Operative store named the "Links". (My wedding reception in 1948 was held in the hall above the shops there.)

WARTIME

As our house was built on the bend and the road twisted and turned uphill, it had wider rooms at the front, narrowing at the back with a very small garden. So, consequently, it was not possible to have an Anderson air raid shelter constructed there.

Until the blitz started in earnest, three of my sisters, my mother and myself went once or twice to the public shelter on part of the Common opposite the 'Links' – a dank uncomfortable place in which to sit out the air raids.

Because of the lack of an air raid shelter, we jumped at the chance to share a house at 97 Macoma Road with my sister, her husband, and two little baby girls.

My sister was soon to be evacuated with the two children into the deep Somerset countryside. My brother-in-law found a house to rent in Bexleyheath so we were able to take over the whole house. Our house, being only three houses from the corner and turning left, would bring us into Macoma Terrace. Then on to Plumstead Common Road where we caught the no. 53, 53a and 54 buses to Woolwich (or right on to the centre of London if we wished).

Me, standing in front of a gap caused by an aerial torpedo, taking out two houses in Macoma Terrace, Plumstead.

Since late 1940, I had worked as a cashier in the newest Co-Op building at the end of Powis Street, Woolwich, at the very top of the building (served by a Lampson Paragon vacuum tube plant).

Seeking local employment, I found a job in 1943 in the offices of Alderton's bakery. Now I could walk to work easily in about fifteen minutes by way of the Slade, with the school on my left, a few shops on my right, including a chemist, greengrocers and a Chadwells bakery shop. Continuing along the road past the Woodman public house on my right, then a small round-a-bout, where the No 54 bus turned round ready to start back for its London run. Then I turned right at a small post office into Swingate Lane, and again into 2 Malton Street, and the premises of Alderton's bakery and office.

Down a few shallow steps on the common opposite the Woodman, a small rather murky lake filled up a natural hollow. The many times I passed this spot, I never noticed any sort of bird life there. I believe there were once railings around this lake, but they probably

disappeared from the scene at the same time the railings were taken from the brick walls in front of our houses, to aid the war effort.

At one time or another we were subject to a variety of bombs being thrown our way. One day, an aerial torpedo, directly in line with our shelter, missed us and took out two houses in Macoma Terrace.

It was still overcrowded in our shelter so, sometimes, when there seemed to be a lull in the bombing, it would make us complacent, and we would take a chance at staying in the house when the siren sounded, sleeping on a mattress half under the living room table. (The indoor Morrison shelters were provided later on in the war.) This was a great mistake on my sister's and my part when land mines were being dropped. One floated down on its parachute, knocking out the row of alms-houses across the Common, leaving only connecting walls standing looking like a giant toast rack.

A few weeks after D. Day on the 6th June 1944, we suffered the shock of Hitler's 'secret weapon No. 1' – the flying bomb, later nicknamed the doodle bug and buzz bomb; it was a pilot-less missile loaded with T.N.T. that fell from the sky when its fuel was exhausted. The air raid warning was almost useless now, as these weapons were fired at us almost constantly night and day. One never knew when one would suddenly appear, especially if it had glided on the prevailing winds and not hearing the roar of the engines that warned us that one was near. One glided by our office window one day, landing a couple of streets away with a mighty bone shattering bang.

Then came secret weapon No. 2 – the rocket.

Luckily for us, the allies were about to overrun the launching sites, so, at least for us, we only experienced one of these ghastly missiles, which landed at Herbert Road, a couple of miles away.

CHANGES

In 1988 and after living in Australia for 32 years, I had the chance to holiday in England and to visit my old haunts.

Some things that had changed over this time I noticed were;-

King's Warren Secondary School, damaged in the war, had been razed and replaced with a comprehensive school.

My old school in Bloomfield Road was now an appendage to Woolwich Polytechnic.

Remains of the alms houses over the Common completely gone.

The "Globe" cinema replaced by a block of flats.

St Margaret's church had been razed, likewise St Mark's church, where three of my sisters and myself had been married.

St Nicholas' hospital refurbished and now a health centre.

The Odeon cinema at Woolwich now a bingo hall.

The Granada cinema at Woolwich now a swimming centre.

The Royal Arsenal ordnance factory partly used for manufacturing needed goods just after

the war, now a bus depot. The old wall demolished but the main gates preserved as an historical monument standing as an island in the middle of Beresford Square.

Woolwich ferry land stages moved slightly to a different site. Just in time to see that Alderton's bakery was being demolished.

Post-War Teenage Memories Of Plumstead

Iris Emily Allen, nee Bryen

I was eleven years old in 1945 when the second world war finished, and living in Brookdene Road, Plumstead. Like all of the other kids, I took my 11+ exam and glory be, I actually passed! I got a scholarship to the local grammar school, King's Warren Grammar School for girls on Plumstead Common. Mum and dad were very proud of me getting into the school and would talk about it to anyone who would listen, making me cringe with embarrassment. My brother Alan was a clever boy and went to a local secondary school.

View looking east along Brookdene Road 29.09.09

King's Warren School sounded very posh to me and woe betide me, it was! The uniform was dark brown, edged in red. How on earth did mum and dad find the money for the uniform? I felt out of my depth from the word go and although I made lots of friends there, I wasn't very happy at school for the next four years. I worried about the coursework and lived in fear of exams. Teachers and Head girls were old fashioned and strict. I remember being hit on the knuckles with a ruler by the French mistress – very painful! She once caught some of us smoking in the toilets and all hell broke loose.

It wasn't all bad though, I liked playing netball and was in the school 2nd team; occasionally we would play away games, which was exciting. I also remember that on Friday afternoons we had S.H.B. lessons in the chemistry lab, Science of the Human Body. When the teacher got to the 'sex thing' we were all in hysterics. Cookery and home economic lessons took place in a school annexe kitted out like an ordinary house with a large kitchen and pantry. In there we learnt to cook and keep house; I loved it. We also learnt needlework and dressmaking. I was in another world and always at the top of class in those exams. I enjoyed the art classes and learned to do italic writing, which I would later use when I worked for The Institute of Army Education at Eltham Palace. After the war mum had taken a job with British Rail; she was a porter and would blow the whistle when everyone was on the train – steam trains then. She liked the job so much that she would work all hours, which left me to cook dinner; I was only 13. I must thank King's Warren for giving me the skills to cook really well and for allowing me to be able to make all of my own clothes.

I'd been at King's Warren for a couple of years, when mum and dad took me and Alan on our first holiday to the seaside. I can't remember exactly where, it may have been the Isle of Wight, but I do remember we stayed at a bed and breakfast hotel. It was so soon after the

war and things were still very scarce, especially food. I do remember going to a cafe by the sea and we all had beans-on-toast, it tasted wonderful. I think the holiday was a bit spoilt for me though because when it was over I had to face all the end of year exams at King's Warren.

There was a 'baby boom' after the war as service men returned home from duty and on 10th July 1947, whilst I was still attending King's Warren school, my sister Marilyn was born. Mum and dad had moved the bed downstairs for the birth, the midwife was there and was abrupt, very matter of fact. I lay in bed listening but eventually got up and sat at the top of the stairs from where I first heard Marilyn cry. I was 13 years old and adored her, I wanted a sister so much! Mum was 45 years old and relied on me a lot to look after the new baby, I was like a mum to Marilyn. My best mate Barbara Blake (who had been evacuated with myself and Alan during the war) would come to our house and together we would take care of her. Marilyn adored our dad and he was besotted with her and spoilt her in every way. Alan and I didn't mind though, we loved her so much.

1948 in the back garden of Brookdene Road.
Barbara Blake (my best mate) /sister Marilyn (age 1)/ me (aged 14).

I finally left King's Warren school just before my 15th birthday, in 1949. Dad had an interview with the Headmistress and told her a 'sob story' that I was to work with my aunt in her shop and that the family needed the money. The Headmistress wished me well and said that my father was absolutely charming. I was pleased to leave the school, even though I had no job to go to!

The area was recovering from the effects of war. I remember that outside the main entrance to the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, there was a big market that I would visit with my mum. Lots of different stalls, lots of noise, lots of smells and lots of bartering going on. You always met someone that you knew at the market. Everything was for sale, cakes, bread, fruit, vegetables, firewood, wool, material, you name it, it was probably there. If you wanted vinegar, then you'd take your own bottle and it would be filled through a funnel. If you wanted a pennyworth of horse radish the vendor would grate the root there and then. Lots of herbs, freshly picked mint (for home made stuffing, delicious), and steaming hot newly cooked beetroots, fantastic.

Go past the entrance to the Arsenal and along Beresford Street, which leads to the Woolwich Ferry, and you would come to the Woolwich Empire Theatre, a lovely old building. Most Wednesday nights during the 1940s mum would take us to see a live show, we saw so many artistes there. I'm sure that Dorothy Squires was one of them, also some others, that I'm not

so certain about, are Joan Reagan, Arthur Askey, Tommy Trinder and Max Bygraves, big names in those days. I do remember seeing 'Jane from the Daily Mirror'. She was a cartoon character, scantily dressed and appeared daily in the newspaper I think. The models had to wear flesh coloured body suits; clever lighting made them appear nude. They were not allowed to move on stage and for me the show was like looking at statues. It was very risqué in those days, and I'm sure that the cartoon strip helped sell many copies of the newspaper.

Our other main entertainment centre was the Kinema Picture House along Plumstead High Street past the fire station. All the boys used to creep in the back door. Saturday morning performances were always full of noisy, loud children. We saw lots of films there, but I particularly remember going with my dad to see a film called 'The Outlaw' starring Jane Russell, about 1946. In one scene in a haystack, she leant forward and the camera zoomed in to a close-up of her low cut neckline, quite outrageous in those days.

Fire Station on south side of Plumstead High Street 29.09.09

Further along the road was the Bag Wash shop. Everyone used the bag wash, no washing machines then. Every week either myself or Alan would have to take a big bag of washing in and pick it up later that day. There was always a queue in the shop and the steamy smell lingered on your clothes. Also on the same road was the Green Man Public House. During the war it was full of service men and women and remained a busy local pub after the war finished – it was rocking. Us kids would be outside most weekends, with a lemonade and a big round hard biscuit, we called them 'dog biscuits'!

We didn't have television in those days, so in the evenings, we would congregate in groups on street corners and generally 'muck about'. The highlight of the week was attending Night School in Plumstead; it may have been in Purrett Road but I'm not sure. Twice a week, ballroom dancing and photography. The photography class had a dark room in which to develop the photos; the boys would try and get the girls in there. Lots of laughter, lots of fun and the teacher was great. I loved the dancing class, I could do all the dances. We had a fantastic time, lots of boys and girls would turn up. The teacher was a lovely lady. I remember rushing home from King's Warren school once to get ready for night school only to find that mum had washed my only silk blouse and it was still wet. I kept ironing it hoping that it would dry but, in desperation, I wore it still very damp. It felt so uncomfortable but I just couldn't miss the dancing class - the things you remember!

Dad had been demobbed from the army and worked for Siemens in Woolwich, near the docks. After I'd left King's Warren school he saw a job advertisement in the Evening News for clerical assistants in the War Department. I applied and was asked to sit an entrance exam in Caxton Hall, central London. My friend Pat had also applied and went with me on the bus; we sat upstairs eating sandwiches prepared by our mums. It was the day after my 15th birthday and I was the youngest there. Two weeks later I heard that I had passed; mum

and dad were so proud of me. I started work at the Institute of Army Education, Eltham Palace, on 2nd August 1949. It was a beautiful place to work and I was lucky enough to work there for 11 wonderful years in the Gatehouse offices. I often cycled there and back from Plumstead to save the bus fare. When I first started, I possessed two skirts (made by me) and two jumpers (knitted by mum). My first wage packet was a joy, £2.5s. I knew that I had to pay mum housekeeping so decided on my way home to give her £1. She said "no, you can have the £1 and I'll have £1.5s!" In those days you didn't disagree with your parents, I was OK with a £1. I used it wisely to make dresses and suits for myself and always saved some in my Post Office Book.

Growing up in the fifties was great fun for me. The war was over, I had a good, well paid job and lots of mates. June was my special friend; she worked in the typing pool at Eltham Palace. June was the only girl that I knew who could drive, and had a Mini Cooper. We were both in our late teens – the world was our oyster! Lots of Canadian soldiers were posted to the Royal Arsenal Depot in Woolwich in 1953; they were great fun and we got to know lots of them. However, one day we went on a day trip to Southend and parked the car on the sea front for a visit to the Kursaal amusement park. It was there that we met a couple of nice lads serving in the Navy, one of whom, Roy, was later to become my husband.

June and I loved clothes and dolling ourselves up to go out dancing. I was a good dancer, having learnt at night school, waltz, foxtrot, quickstep, tango, and of course, be-bop and jive.

1954 Charabanc outing to Southend-on-Sea from the Maybloom Club - me circled with various family and friends

During the late 1940s we used to go to the Maybloom Social Club on Bostall Hill, Abbey Wood. We were able to walk to the Maybloom from Brookdene Road along Plumstead High Street. It was a regular Saturday night out. It was a lovely building; downstairs was the bar and billiards room (strictly for men only), and up a large staircase was a hall where you

could dance. There was also a stage where people could sing with a microphone accompanied by a resident pianist. We had some great nights in the Maybloom.

When the trolley bus came on the public transport scene the good old tram was no longer viable. Trams were beautifully built with hard wooden slatted seats – very uncomfortable. They had a peculiar metallic smell and would hurtle along tracks throwing passengers from side to side. The trams were always clean, the wood shone and the brass gleamed, but the journey from Plumstead to Woolwich seemed to take ages. The last tram to run from Abbey Wood along the Woolwich Road was quite an occasion, I think it was 1952 when I was 18 years old. The Maybloom decided to celebrate the demise of the tram and that particular night the club was packed; all my family were there. We all went outside to see the tram pass by on its last journey. People were singing and cheering, fireworks lighting the dark sky, a right old party! A favourite entertainer at the Maybloom was the Spoon King; he was there that night playing his spoons up and down his arms and legs getting everyone dancing. It was a grand night.

I'd exchanged addresses with Roy, the navy man that I'd met in Southend whilst on a day trip with my mate June. He began spending most of his leaves with me; we enjoyed ourselves, always laughing, wonderful times with all of our mates. We fell in love and were married 18 months later in Sidcup Registry office, 21st December 1956, I was 22 years old. A lot had happened to me in those years growing up in Woolwich and Plumstead.

Our marriage was to last for 52 years until Roy sadly died early in 2009, aged 76. He was a wonderful husband and father; his passing away prompted me to commit my memories to paper, I think that he would have enjoyed reading them!

Mum/Me/Roy/Dad 21st Dec 1956 - our wedding day!

Pregnant & Evacuated: Woolwich To Blackpool

Unknown mum

In 1944 my mother, who at the time was pregnant with me, was told to leave Woolwich, where she lived with my sister who was about 18 months at the time; my father was in the R.A.F. A special train was laid on to take the evacuees to Blackpool. My mother travelled in a carriage with a friend also heavily pregnant and their children. As at the time trains were very vulnerable to bombing. The train journey took a very long while,my mother informed me that they and the children didn't have any food or drink and they and the children were exhausted at the end. They didn't realise they should have been in the carriage for pregnant mothers, which they found out too late.

All the families were taken to a large hall in Blackpool where one by one they were picked by the residents to live with them. My mother and her friend were the only two adults left with their children; she said to me it was probably because we were pregnant. Eventually my mother was taken by a local policeman, who started knocking on the doors of the local houses. One lady of a house in Blackpool said she had a room but she had a gentleman due to come on a day, whereas my mum said that's when my baby is due. The room was at the top of the house, my mum said she had to struggle, heavily pregnant and towing my sister without any help from this lady, (how unkind was that). The day I was due my mum was so worried about being thrown out she took caster oil to bring on labour, which it did.

My mum was taken to the Hydro Hotel in Clevelys which was taken over by the civil service for pregnant mothers. At the same time my sister was taken away to be looked after.

My mum had a difficult time after having me so therefore was at the Hydro Hotel for seven months; she had nothing but praise for the care she and I received there.

When it came for us to leave, my sister couldn't be found. It was such a scandal at the time that my mum said it was headline news in the local newspaper. Eventually, a local vicar took control and my sister was found. When my mum saw her all her curls had been cut off, she wouldn't cuddle my mum, and the first time my mum gave her a bath she screamed, so she assumed she had been badly treated, maybe being scalded in the bath.

I have related the story as told to me by my mum.

Last year I tried to visit the place of my birth at Clevelys but there is nothing left of the Hydro Hotel. I visited a local library and was able to find out details Hydro in war time and there were photos of the actual building there too.

I am recounting this story in memory of my wonderful mum and dad who went through many heartaches in the war years.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

Prison Hulks Stories Moored At Woolwich

compiled by Lee Jackson

When appointed to transport convicts to Western Australia in 1855, the *William Hammond* was still considered a new ship, and had an A1 rating. With Horatio Edwards as captain and George McLaren as surgeon-superintendent, the *William Hammond* embarked 35 convicts from the Woolwich prison hulk *Defence* on 6 December 1855, and another 32 convicts from the hulk *Warrior* shortly afterwards. On 8 December she was towed out of Woolwich dock and sailed down the River Thames. After clearing the Straits of Dover she encountered stormy weather in the English Channel. She sailed along the south coast of England, docking at Portsmouth. On 17 December she took on 59 more convicts, and the following day she anchored off the Isle of Portland, where it took on 80 convicts from Portland Prison. It left Portland on 24 December, but shortly afterwards a sailor named John Gollately fell overboard while trying to stow the jib. Another sailor, John Deady, attacked the Chief Mate, David Kid, saying it was his fault the man fell overboard. The *William Hammond* then set in at Plymouth, where Deady was tried before a magistrate and sentenced to 21 days imprisonment. Six sailors who due to various illness were deemed unfit to travel were also disembarked. After taking on 45 more convicts from Dartmoor Prison, the *William Hammond* sailed for Western Australia on 5 January 1856.

The *William Hammond* sailed with 32 crew, 250 convicts and 98 passengers, most of whom were pensioner guards and their families. She sailed directly to Fremantle, and the journey took 84 days.

Only one person died on the journey, a corporal in the pensioner guard named Henry Fraser.

At about 7 pm on 28 March, the William Hammond sighted the lighthouse on Rottnest Island. Anchor was dropped in the lee of Rottnest early the next morning, and at 7 am the Fremantle harbour master boarded the ship. The passengers were disembarked by mid-afternoon, and the convicts were disembarked over the next two days.

William Boxhal (c. 12 February 1832–12 January 1893) was a convict transported to Western Australia. He later became a farmer in the Victoria Plains district, and was one of the first such farmers to secure land in the area.

On 23 August 1852, Boxhal and another soldier of the 50th Regiment named John Jones were charged with burglary. According to their arraignment, they "At Fulwood in a shop of one Arthur Phipps Rudman, did feloniously break and enter and light pieces of paper of the value of one penny... and in the said shop... by force of arms did steal, take and carry away sixty one pounds in money." The pair were also charged with a virtually identical burglary of a shop belonging to a George Worthington. The two men were found guilty in October, and sentenced to ten years' penal transportation.

Boxhal would have been lodged at first in the Preston jail, then later sent to Millbank Prison to serve his mandatory period of solitary confinement. In September 1853 he was transferred to the Woolwich prison hulk *Defence,* where he was set to work at the Woolwich Arsenal. Boxhal remained at Woolwich until December 1855, when he was placed on board the *William Hammond* for transportation to Western Australia. The *William Hammond* left London

on 8 December, taking on more convicts at Portsmouth and Portland and later stopping at Plymouth before finally sailing for Western Australia on 5 January 1856. It arrived at Fremantle, Western Australia on 28 March 1856.

William Boxhal was issued with a ticket of leave within a week of arrival at Fremantle. He was probably then sent to the Toodyay convict depot, as by January the following year he was working as a shepherd for Dom Rosendo Salvado. A number of extant contracts between Salvado and Boxhal indicate that Boxhal worked for Salvado for a number of years. In May 1862 Boxhal and another convict named Charles Delaney were contracted to construct fencing, and later to clear ground; in April 1863 he was contracted as a bullock teamster; and in August he was contracted as a sheep shearer.

On 4 May 1863, William Boxhal married Mary Ann Kelly, the daughter of an Irish pensioner guard. He then began establishing himself as a farmer. Initially, he squatted or leased an area of land south of New Norcia in partnership with an ex-convict named Owen Lavin. In 1866, the two men secured joint title to a 40-acre (160,000 m2) lot on the road to Guildford, becoming virtually the first farmers to secure land in the area. Boxhal sunk a well and built a house for his wife. The first of nine children was born in June 1864.

In 1870, Boxhal bought a 10-acre (40,000 m2) lot on the northern boundary of his land. Later, he bought another hundred acres. He was sufficiently successful that between 1868 and 1872 he employed 11 ticket-of-leavers men. He continued to increase his land holding, and in 1884 he leased 3000 acres (12 km²) of farmland surrounding his freehold land.

Mary Ann Boxhal died on 3 February 1887. Some time after this, Boxhal moved to a rented house in Guildford. In January 1892, he sold all his freehold land to a Victoria Plains farmer named John Woods. Later that year he was diagnosed with cancer. Leaving his home in Guildford, he travelled to Berkshire Valley north east of New Norcia, to visit one of his sons. He died there on 12 January 1893, and was buried in New Norcia cemetery.

HMS *Hindostan* (variously *Hindustan*)

She was a 50-gun Fourth Rate two-decker ship of the line of the Royal Navy. Originally a teak-built East Indiaman named *Admiral Rainier*, she was bought into Royal Navy service in May 1804. Perhaps her best known voyage was her trip to Australia in 1809 when she and *Dromedary* brought Governor Lachlan Macquarie to replace Governor William Bligh after the Rum Rebellion.

Captain Bendall Littehalles recommissioned *Hindostan* in December 1806. A year later she was repaired at Woolwich in January 1807. Then in February Captain Thomas Bowen took command. On 28 June she sailed as a convoy escort to the Mediterranean, returning towards the end of the year. On 11 November, the Admiralty ordered her to be converted to a store ship and her guns were reduced from 54 to 22, primarily by the removal of the guns on her Lower Deck. Commander Lewis Hole took command in December. In April 1808 her captain was Commander Fitzowen Skinner and she was with a squadron operating off Lisbon.

In November 1808 she was recommissioned as a troopship under Commander John Pasco.

Hindostan was converted to a store ship in 1811 under Duncan Weir. She was in the Mediterranean in 1815, and then reverted to being a store ship in Woolwich.

In 1819 she was renamed *Dolphin*. She was hulked at Woolwich March 1824 as a prison ship. She was renamed *Justitia* in 1831. She was finally sold on 24 October 1855.

Some of the known Prison Hulks moored at Woolwich

HMS Ceres 1787-1797 Woolwich. *Ceres* was a 32-gun Fifth Rate launched in 1781 and broken up in 1830.

HMS Dasher 1832-1838 Woolwich. *Dasher* was an 18-gun sloop launched in 1797. She became a prison hulk in 1832 and was broken up in 1838.

HMS Defence 1850-1857 Woolwich and Portsmouth. *Defence* was a 74-gun Third Rate ship of the line, built in 1815 and broken up in 1857.

HMS Discovery 1818-1834 Woolwich and Deptford. *Discovery* was a 10-gun sloop launched and purchased in 1789. She was commanded by Captain George Vancouver on his voyage of exploration from 1791 to 1795. She was converted to a bomb vessel in 1799, a prison hulk in 1818 and was broken up in 1834.

HMS Dromedary 1825-1864 Woolwich and Bermuda. *Dromedary* was an East Indiaman that the Navy purchased in 1805. First named Howe and then renamed *Dromedary* in 1806. She was converted to a prison hulk in 1825, at Bermuda and broken up there in 1864.

HMS Ganymede 1819-1838 Chatham and Woolwich. *Ganymede* was the French frigate *Hébé* captured in 1809. She was converted to a prison hulk in 1819 and broken up in 1838.

HMS Hebe 1839-1852 Woolwich. *Hebe* was a 46-gun Fifth Rate launched in 1826, made a receiving ship in 1839, hulked in 1861, and broken up 1873.

HMS Justitia 1830-1855 Woolwich. *Justitia* was originally launched as an East Indiaman named Admiral Rainier. The Admiralty purchased her in 1804 to use as a 50-gun Fourth Rate, and named her *HMS Hindostan.* She was converted into a 20-gun store ship in 1811. She was renamed again in 1819 as *Dolphin*, and once more in 1830 as *Justitia*, when she became a prison hulk. She was finally sold in 1855.

HMS Leven 1827-1848 Woolwich and Deptford. *Leven* was launched in 1813 at Ipswich. She became a hospital ship in 1827 and then a prison hulk at Chatham. She became a receiving ship at Limehouse in 1842 and was broken up in 1848.

HMS Prudent 1779-1814 Woolwich. P*rudent* was launched in 1768 at Woolwich Dockyard. She was on put on harbour service 1779 and sold in 1814.

HMS Retribution 1814-1835 Woolwich and Sheerness. *Retribution* was a prison hulk launched in 1799 as the 74-gun Third Rate *HMS Edgar. Edgar* was converted into a prison hulk in 1813, renamed *Retribution* in 1814 and broken up in 1835.

HMS Savage 1804-1815 Woolwich. *Savage* was a 14-gun sloop launched in 1778. She became a hulk in 1804 and was sold in 1815.

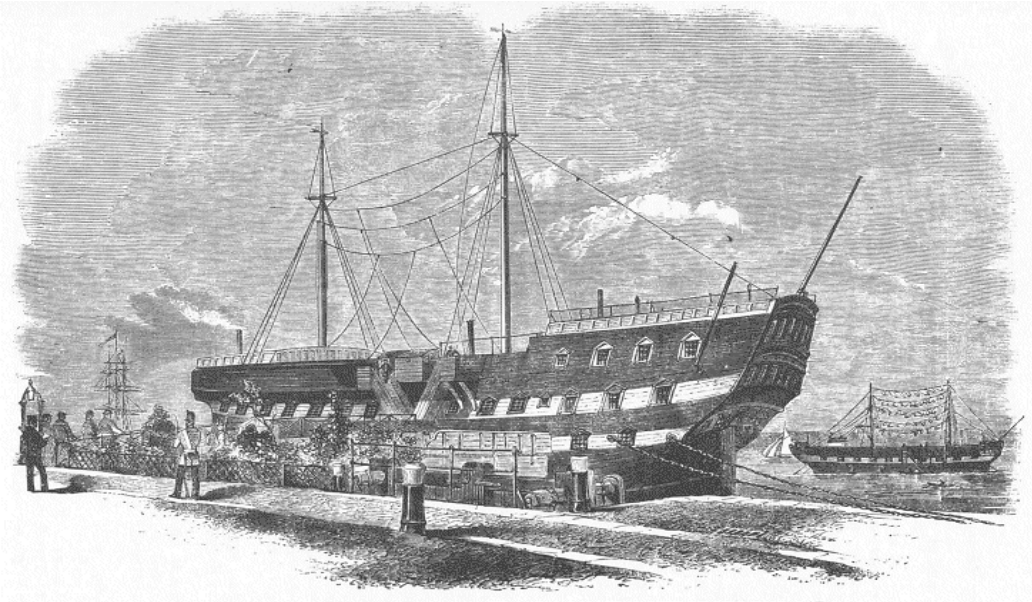
HMS Sulphur 1843-1857 Woolwich. *Sulphur* was a 10-gun bomb vessel launched in 1826. She was used as a survey ship from 1835, and for harbour service from 1843. She was broken up in 1857.

HMS Unite 1832-1858 Woolwich. *Unite* was a 40-gun Fifth Rate captured from the French in 1793. She was taken into service as *HMS Imperieuse* and was renamed *Unite* in 1803. She was

on harbour service from 1832 and was broken up in 1858.

THE WARRIOR

*HMS Warrio*r 1840-1857 Woolwich. *Warrior* was a 74-gun Third Rate ship of the line launched in 1781. She became a receiving ship after 1818, a prison hulk after 1840, and was broken up in 1857.



THE "WARRIOR" HULK WITH THE "SULPHUR" WASHING-SHIP IN THE DISTANCE.

The Warrior, pictured here in the atypical position of being tied up to the dock, was a decommissioned naval vessel, acquired, retrofitted and pressed into service as a prison hulk at Woolwich in 1840 by John Capper who, for thirty years, was Manager of the Hulk Establishment. During the earliest of those years Capper made improvements and provided competent oversight of the hulks. Soon enough, however, he became inactive and allowed conditions aboard the vessels to deteriorate. Warrior continued in service until 1856, typically housing 400 convicts. She was one of the last of the hulks in English waters.

The Defence

This is the only known photograph of an English prison hulk. It was taken in 1857 shortly before the Defence burned off the Woolwich docks, bringing the era of the hulks in England to a close. The vessel to the left is the hospital hulk Unite. The Defence had been placed in service at Woolwich in 1850. Before the fire, the convict count had been reduced to 171. All were evacuated safely. Had anything close to her capacity of 400 been aboard, a tragedy could not have been avoided. Unite had been a well regarded frigate in the British navy. Many years later she was to have the dubious honour of being the last of the hulks in English waters. She retained a few "invalids" aboard for about two weeks after the burning of the Defence.

The Hulk Masters

The Hulk Masters, and the man who exposed the nefarious nature of the Hulks, are illustrated here in imagined portraits by Chandler Carlson

Duncan Campbell made a portion of his considerable fortune transporting convicts to America— his ships returning each time with profitable cargoes of tobacco. All of that came to an end in 1776 when the colonies declared their independence and said, "No more British convicts." It was then that the profitable contract for confining convicts aboard his ships anchored at Woolwich fell into his lap. He continued as Great Britain's "for profit" hulk master for twenty-five years, before giving up the contract to devote more of his attention to his lucrative West Indies sugar trade. During all of Campbell's tenure conditions of confinement aboard the old vessels were lamentable, and life for the prisoners was unrelieved misery. Mr Campbell bore the convicts no ill will. It was simply a matter of conducting business profitably. Thus we have an early demonstration of the usual results of prison privatization.

See also the story: The Hulks At Woolwich on page 420.

Red Alert At Woolwich Arsenal

Winifred Butler

I was 18 when the War started and I worked at a weaving firm which sadly caught fire through an incendiary bomb. I worked for a few weeks as a postwoman which I enjoyed as it was at the same office where my father worked but he would not let me deliver to the local school where the army was billeted.

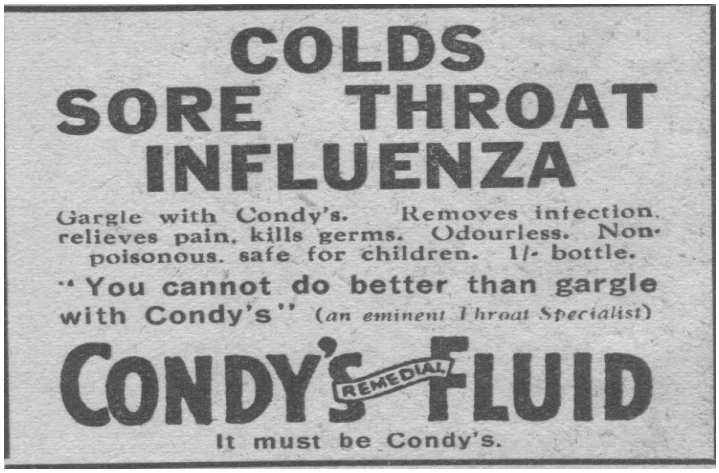
Then I was called up and I went into munitions at Woolwich Arsenal. It was quite a journey. I had to leave home at about 6.30 am to get to the gates of the factory by 7.45 am and then catch a bus and a train to the actual shed itself. This was a bit like an aircraft hangar. We worked until 7.00 pm, so it was very late by the time I arrived home as the trams were very infrequent.

I was on inspection of cartridges and had to make sure they weren't faulty. I was very fortunate as I did not work in the Danger Buildings where they worked with raw cordite which made the workers' skins turn a nasty shade of orange and there were always ' incidents' happening in these sheds.

One day when the Red Alert sounded for raids I dived under my workbench - remembering first to put on my tin hat - but ignoring the fact that I was sheltering underneath live explosives. The Major who was in charge of our Shop said it was the funniest thing he had ever seen!

I worked at Woolwich for about 4 years during which time we lost our own home to the Blitz but thankfully no-one was seriously injured. My mother and my younger brothers and sisters were all evacuated, so dad and I kept each other company and we were very close. Like most people we had some narrow escapes but we all came through and we are still a very close family.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'



Remembering

Kathleen Barbara Smith nee Green, born Hammond

I was born at Russell Stoneham Home for Mother's and Babies in August 1943. Being born illegitimate, I stayed there for the first two years of my life. I was then put up for fostering. Luckily for me a couple from Abbey Wood took me in and I spent the rest of my single life living with them. They adopted me, and to me, they were the parents I loved.

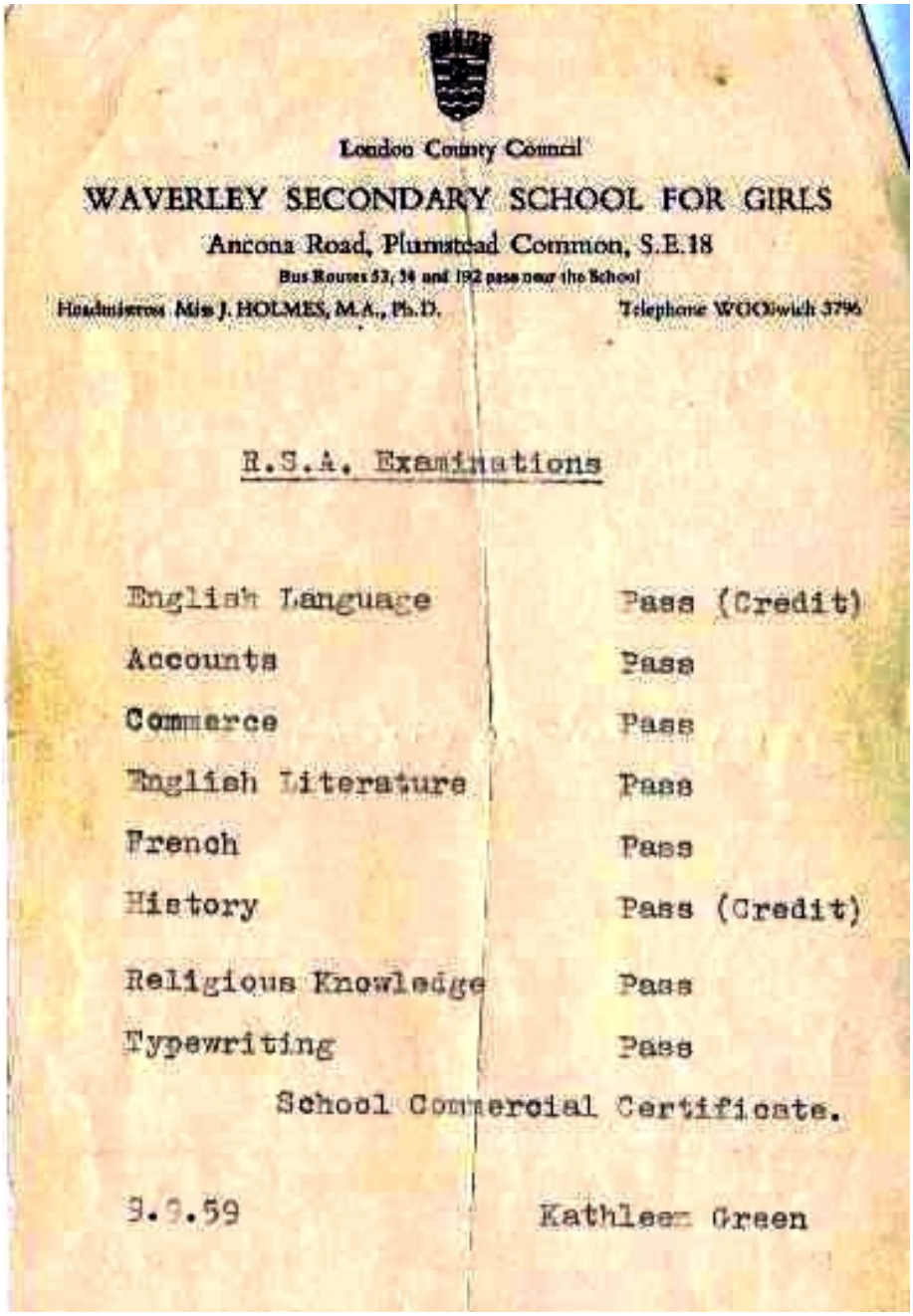
Form 1B (1954/5) at Waverley School.
Top row from left to right: Christine Taylor, Jeanette Webster, Wendy Laden, Mary Walker, Margaret Bolton, Pearl Perry, Dorothy Hare, Catherine Alison.
Second row left to right: Patricia Higgs, Joan Mummery, Wendy Savage, Heather Benson. Vera Tanner, Jackie Lavery, Margaret Thornton. Barbara Haig, Florence Ott, Mary Glastonbury, Doreen Banks, (Me) Kathleen Green, Heather Anderson.
Next row sitting left to right: Sally Wells, Penelope Lang, ? ? Penny Lambert, Frances Heath, Pauline Ellis, Joan Hewson.
Last row sitting left to right: Jackie Wood, Carole Colmer, Anne Hutchinson, Joan Salter, Anne Stannard, Pauline Ward, Jean Loder.

Life in Bastion Road was idyllic to me. I went to Wickham Lane Infants and then to Bostall Lane School (now Alexander McLeod School) and then I went to Waverley Central School for Girls on Plumstead Common. I remember the top floor of Bostall Lane School was badly damaged by bombing and, during my 3rd year there, several classes of children were sent to school in Federation Road (What is now the big caravan park). I absolutely loved it there. It was 'in the woods' where we used to build 'houses' in the bushes and collect pieces of china to furnish our houses. We were also given a patch of ground to make our own garden. I grew nasturtiums and marigolds and from that nurtured my long lasting great love of the open air and of gardening.

Me and Raymond Cottingham, 10 Bastion Road, c.1948.

The days were long and full; in my memory I never remember it raining! My best friend at that time was a black boy, Raymond Cottingham. He lived next door and he and his sister Susan were fostered to a Mrs. Smith from the same home I came from. We were inseparable, but suddenly, when I was about ten, he was not there any more. He wrote to me, but my mother would not let me reply. I often wonder what happened to him. I remember he lost his two front teeth sliding on the ice in Bostall Lane playground. He then had two false ones but, riding on the Woolwich Ferry one day, he leaned over the side and lost them.

My girl friend in those days (and to the present day) was Doreen Banks, who lived up in the woods, actually the last house in Old Park Road. I thought she lived in paradise having all those woods around her.



London County Council

WAVERLEY SECONDARY SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Ancona Road, Plumstead Common, S.E.18

Bus Routes 53, 54 and 192 pass near the School

Headmistress: Miss J. HOLMES, M.A., Ph.D. Telephone: WOOlwich 3796

R.S.A. Examinations

English Language	Pass (Credit)
Accounts	Pass
Commerce	Pass
English Literature	Pass
French	Pass
History	Pass (Credit)
Religious Knowledge	Pass
Typewriting	Pass

School Commercial Certificate.

3.9.59 Kathleen Green

My final exams at Waverley R.S.A 1959.

In September 1953, I started life at Waverley School. I loved school and spent five happy years there. I vehemently recall the day I was given a joke to read, 'The virgins Ball', which I remember started:

Four and twenty virgins came down from Inverness.

When the Ball was over there were four and twenty less.

There were numerous verses to this poem, so my friend Pauline and I wrote them all down and passed them on to the other girls. One of the girls, Wendy Savage, I believe, hid it under her pillow and her mum found it and came to see Dr Holmes the Headmistress! Dr Holmes came to our class and asked for the girls involved to stand up. Pauline and I were terrified

and at first did not own up, but because the 'naughty' girl in the class, Wendy Laden, was being blamed, we did eventually admit to the 'crime' I always remember Dr Holmes words, 'It is taking nature into your own hands and shredding it to pieces' She said she intended to find the source of this 'filth' and Pauline and I spent an horrendous week or so worrying whether we would be expelled. One day Dr Holmes came to the class and made Pauline and I stand up. She said she was so disgusted, but she was not taking the matter any further. I couldn't believe our luck. A few years later, I went to work for a book Company in Regent's Park and flicking through a book entitled 'The Muses of Caledonia' by Robert Burns I saw, to my amazement, the poem. No wonder she didn't want to take it any further, but she had put Pauline and I through shear hell.

Teachers at Waverley School.
Top row, l-r. Mrs. Bird, Miss Knight, Miss Hersey, Mrs, Dyer.
Next row . Mrs. Bryant, (formerley Miss Macvey) Miss Tarrant, ? Mrs. Eldridge, Mrs. Paris, Mrs. Blackman.
Next row . Miss Toft, Mrs. Myers, Mrs.Shearer, Mrs. Jury, Mrs. Seeley, Miss Martin, Mrs. Hart, Miss Stay.
Front row. Miss Francis, Miss Eggleton, Miss Dransfield, Miss Thompson, Dr. Holmes (Headmistress) Miss Beyton, Miss Stevenson, Mrs. Reid, Mrs. Smith.

Days at school were happy but the days at home were better. I had another friend, Barbara Kirby, who lived in the 'new houses' (I lived in the 'old houses'). There were a lot of children in our road, mostly in the 'old houses' and we formed a gang. Barbara and myself being the leaders so to speak. The buses at that time used to park in Bastion Road, as there was a cafe there, and the drivers and conductors used to take their break there whilst we played on the buses.

We played numerous games such as marbles, played along the gutter, two or even three balls up the wall, cigarette cards, jacks, skipping, but best of all was 'forty'. Forty was Hide and Seek, a variation of this was Sardines, where one person would have to find all the others who had found a hiding place and you squashed in together like sardines. Playing

this game we found what we named 'Proctor's Hole'. It was behind the hoardings at Wickham Lane corner and turned out to be an old air-raid shelter, long disused. There was a rusty metal ladder going down to the bottom of 'the hole' and then we could walk under the Wickham Lane road. It was pitch dark (we took torches and candles) and there was an old iron bed down them and some army coats and things. I was very frightened but I could not let on to my friends that I was a scaredy-cat. I often think if that rusty old ladder had broken, as it could well have done, we would have been down there for days, as it was totally forgotten about. I often wonder if it is still there.

Bostall Lane Sunday School Class. The black boy is my friend Raymond Cottingham, his sister Susan, with the bows, is second row up. Next to Raymond is Doreen Banks. The girl holding the poster is Sylvia Whitton from the sweet shop.

The local shops

My memories now move on to the many shops we had in our area and the people that ran them. All our shopping was done at the Co-Op. My parents were big members of the Co-Op, which looked after you from birth until death. Our Co-Op was at the top of Basildon Road. It sold bread, meat, green grocery and general groceries and there was even the Co-Op undertakers across the road. After a purchase, you were given tin checks to the value of the purchase. These checks were kept safely in a tin until you had a £1's worth, which were then taken to the Check Office in the shop and exchanged for a brass check to value £1. Every six months these brass checks were taken back to the Check Office and counted and the amount entered into your Co-Op pass book. Later the Dividend pay-out would be announced. Once it was 2/6d, in the £1. (12 and l/2p.) My mum bought all her linen with her 'divi' as it was called.

Across the main road was Searle's, where Len Searle ran the paper shop and sweet shop. I remember one day he wouldn't trust me with a penny, when I didn't have quite enough money, and my mum wrote him a note and said after 30 years of shopping there she wouldn't go there any more and we moved our paper order to Hall's at Wickham Lane. Up from Searle's was Whitton's, which was my favourite shop. It sold all the sweets imaginable and cards. At Bostall Lane School, if you collected the most stars you would get a voucher to spend in Whitton's for 6d. (2 1/2p.) As I was very bright I often won and always chose from a jar which held stale fondants. Mr. Whitton would let me buy them and very glad he was, I think, to be rid of them.

Early post card of Wickham Lane and Plumstead Road corner. Photo from Brian Walker.

A larger group of shops was situated at Wickham Lane corner. First, there was Birch's. I can still smell it! They sold groceries; a spotlessly clean shop with sawdust on the floor. I recall the very long marble-topped counter that went right along the shop on which many products were stacked. Next door, was another sweet shop, Beckenham's, run by two (I thought) old ladies. One had 'ear-phones', plaits wound around her ears. They were tiny ladies; sisters I believe, and very stern. They always wore floral smocks. Once, I dropped my sweet ration coupon behind their marble topped table and they would not move the table for me to retrieve it. So I lost my sweet ration for that week! Next to them was the upholsterer Sonny Perry and his brother Fred. (Sonny died years ago but the last time I was there, Fred was still running the business with his son.) Next door was Oram's the oil shop. Mr. Oram always wore a brown overall. I loved the smell of that shop. He sold paraffin, candles, brooms, corn and, unfortunately for me , canes. My mum went to cane the dog and I took the cane and broke it in half. She was very angry and took sixpence from my money box and then made me go to Oram's and buy another cane. When I came home she caned the dog and then caned me for breaking the first cane! Next to them was the chemist and then, lastly, the wool shop. I believe at one time there was a cafe next to the wool shop, but my memory escapes me somewhat. Then there was a row of houses and then the Dairy, which later became a timber merchants.

Across Wickham Lane was yet another sweet shop which always smelt of boiled cabbage, a couple more shops, I cannot remember what they sold, and then again ANOTHER sweet shop, Renee's.

Renee's shop had a high up counter and I can still picture Renee looking down over the counter at me. I used to buy iced Jubblys there; they were a cubed orange drink which she

froze; we loved them, they lasted for ages. You sucked and sucked them until all the orange was gone and you were left with a block of ice. Later on, shopkeepers were banned from freezing them, 'Health and Safety' existed somewhat, even in the fifties.

Next to Renee's was Mr Perry. (No relation to Perry the upholsterer). He was a cobbler. There was also a cobblers opposite Whitton's; everyone had shoes mended in those days, although my dad always mended our shoes, with soles and heels bought from Woolworth's. Mr Perry was forever mending my leather school satchel, the stitching kept splitting and he would charge me 6d. (2 1/2p) to repair it.

Next to the cobbler was the off-licence which we didn't much frequent; only at Christmas for the bottle of sherry, whisky and a few Mackeson's stouts. There was another off-licence at the bottom of Basildon Road which we occasionally used when the occasion arose.

Then there was the shops at Camrose Street. On the corner was the bakers, which later became a hairdressers, then the laundry where, once a week, I took my sister's, (she was married) sheets, towels and table-cloths to be laundered. I still remember her laundry mark, No-E650. Next door was another grocery shop. It was a lovely shop, but the only thing my mum sent me there to buy was a jar of 'Splendo' which was a bit like 'Marmite'. Next door was Hall's the paper shop and lastly Doctor Boomla. He and his brother practised there. Their names were originally Bloomerts, but everyone laughed, so they changed it to Boomla!

After the parade of shops was St Nicholas Church, where, during my childhood, I was sent every Sunday morning in my best Sunday clothes, which were changed immediately I came home. I used to go to church with Raymond, the boy next door. I asked my mum once why she didn't go and she said it was because she was deaf! My dad never went either. I remember the organist turning up very late one Sunday; it was very cold in the church and he sat at the organ with his back to us with steam coming off his bald head; we had a fit of the giggles and we were both reprimanded about it.

I found church very boring. It was the same repetitive service week after week. I still remember the words to this day and no-one ever told me what they meant. When it came to the creed I would not say the bit, "I believe in one Holy Catholic Church" because I thought, 'no, I am a Protestant not a Catholic'.

The big event in our annual calendar was the Maybloom Working Men's Club Outing. For years I never went because my parents did not belong to the club. And then I became friends with Barbara Kirby and as her dad was a member of the Maybloom he got me a ticket to go with her. My parents held a dim view of people going to working men's clubs to drink.

The outing was always held at the end of July and almost always they went to Margate. There were 42 coaches lined up in Bastion Road and the prime target was to get the back seat on the coach number 1.

We were given a white cardboard box filled with sandwiches, a piece of cake, an apple and an orange and 2/6d (22 1/2p) to spend. It was like a fortune! We left Bastion Road at 8.20 am, stopped on the way at an inn which accepted coaches, arriving at Margate around mid-day. It was always hot, and we swam in the blue sea and played in the golden sands until 5 pm, when we all met at the large restaurant in Dreamland (the funfair) to have our tea. I cannot remember anything of what we ate; I suppose because I was so keen to get to the funfair.

How I loved it all - the ghost train, the caterpillar, the tugs and the one-penny slot machines. At 7 pm we made our way back to the coaches for the long trip home. When we stopped, I always bought my mum some flowers. I remember buying her a bunch of Sweet Williams – nine pence! We used to arrive back home about 10.30 pm. Nowadays, you can do that journey in half the time.

I recall one of my main activities was visiting the Library along Plumstead High Street, as I was an avid reader. Whilst there I always visited the museum where my brother-in-law, Reg Rigden was Curator. He used to take me out the back and show me exhibits which were not on show. I remember he was putting a skeleton together, which I found very fascinating. One of the exhibits was a mammoth's tooth, found in King's Highway. Reg was also a trumpet player and was a member of the first Dixieland band ran by George Webb.

Another activity was at the Plumstead Swimming Baths, situated opposite the Library. There were two separate pools, a large pool and a smaller one. My mum paid 2/6d a session for me to have lessons with Mr Priddom, an Olympic swimming instructor. I soon became an accomplished swimmer thanks to this. I swam Monday nights with the Co-Op Club, Tuesdays with school, Wednesdays on my own after school, Thursday afternoon with the school, Thursday evening with the Woolwich Swimming Club and lessons on Saturday.

At home we didn't have a bathroom and had a bath in the scullery, which also served as a table during the week, covered with a black and white chequered board on the top of the bath. The lavatory was out in the garden. We all had a 'potty' under the bed; the first job of the day was emptying the slops and then laying the fire.

Later on in my childhood we had an extension added for a bathroom. We were considered very posh; the first in the 'old houses' of Bastion Road to have a proper bathroom. But my mum was scared stiff of the gas geyser that heated the water, as it nearly used to explode when you turned it on, so she wouldn't let me have more than half an inch of water. She added another half inch and dad, lastly, another half inch, so he had the luxury of one and a half inches of water. Added to this luxury was a handful of soda and a slug of Dettol. I got so fed up with the arguments over the amount of water used, I ended up in my teenage years going to Plumstead Public Baths, where, for one shilling, I could have water up to my neck. Oh, the luxury of it!

Christmas was a wonderful time for me as a child. My sister, who had also been adopted, and was seventeen years my senior, showered me with wonderful gifts. She never had any children and I was the substitute child for her. Christmas Eve in our front room, which was a sacred place the rest of the year and used only for funerals or if the doctor came, was emptied of all its furniture. The carpet was rolled up, the piano put in place and the radiogram, which held twelve records at one time, was wired to a loud-speaker. A table was put in the corner of the room for the beers, whisky and sherry. The family was asked to contribute thirty shillings (£1,50) towards the drinks (except my brother-in-law, who said he refused to pay to come to a party, so my sister came alone). After tea the aunts, uncles and cousins and a few close friends arrived. Uncle Tom played the accordion, Winifred Attwell pumped out "Let's Have a Party' on the radiogram and sister Pat played the piano. As the drinks flowed, so did the singing and dancing, always ending up with 'Knees up Mother

Brown' and 'I've Got a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts' and then out into the street for the Conga. I remember one year the miserable old lady next door, Mrs Webb, called the police, but they just winked and told us to keep the noise down. Next day, Boxing Day, the floor was washed and the neighbours invited in for another sing song. I remember my little uncle Arthur (who was a midget) locking himself into the outside lavatory, very drunk (he didn't normally drink) singing 'Mr Sandman'. – he was never allowed to live it down! Years later, when he died, I wrote on his wreath –"Goodnight Mr Sandman".

I can remember one of the neighbours hanging from the top of the lamp post to which he had shinned up, with the parson's nose in his mouth; it was all good clean fun, no nastiness. After Boxing Day the floor was washed and left until New Year's Eve when another party took place with all the relatives and neighbours together, that was a great evening. At twelve o' clock the boats on the Thames would sound their hooters and we would dance in the street, finishing with 'Auld Lang Syne' and Mrs Webb peeping from behind her curtains. No television at Christmas in those days.

To this day I have still kept my friendship with Doreen Banks (63 years) Barbara Kirby (55 years) and Pauline Ellis (54 years.) "Old friends never die.....". Even though I have lived in West Wales for the past 30 years and I wouldn't wish to go back to London, but my heart is always there.

(2009)

Remembering The Bread Roundsman

Derek Boswell

I was born at the height of the great depression early in 1932, and shortly afterwards my father was made redundant. Faced with keeping a wife and small child, he was ready to take any job that came his way. He heard that Mr Chapman of Chapman and Son, the bakers of No 2 Griffin Road was looking for a delivery roundsman. He applied and got the job servicing a round covering the Bostall Heath and Welling border area. He kept this until he was drafted into the RAF in January 1941. Just before the outbreak of war, when I was some seven years old, dad used to take me on his round when it was school holidays. I loved this, as I had as many cakes of all descriptions as I could eat and, at lunch time, he would take me to 'Frank's' coffee stall, situated on the waste ground at the corner of Okehampton Crescent and Lodge Hill. This was simply a wooden shack, but they sold what were to me, the most delicious sausage rolls and sandwiches possible.

Chapman's Confection & Bakery shop on corner Griffin and Plumstead High Roads late Victorian era.

In those days in this area there were many properties known generally as 'the huts'. These, I understand, were the first world war pre-fabs, but they were still being lived in and we delivered to many customers that lived in many of them.

When the war came, the bakers rounds were soon suspended but dad kept his job until called into the RAF in January 1941. He was posted to RAF Digby, a fighter airfield in Lincolnshire, where he was the driver of the station fire tender.

Chapman's Bakers shop, a close up view showing the Victorian style clothing of that era.
Photo from Helen Jones via John Boon's web site.

By all accounts, he attended many horrific crash scenes, which had a bad effect on him and he was discharged early in 1942. Then, with so many people having been drafted into armed services, he could have had a wide pick of jobs, but loyally, he returned to Chapman's, who by that time had been successful in obtaining the contract to supply the canteens in the Royal Arsenal with bread etc. Whilst there was restricted access to the Arsenal, dad was of course allowed in to do his job, which largely consisted of delivering sacks of bread rolls. I was then ten years old and, not having been evacuated, used to accompany dad many times. Being only a van boy I was able to go into these restricted premises with my father and I can recall the names of many of the canteens. There was 'Central' which served the offices near the main entrance in Beresford Square. 'Flagstaff', 'CF3' near the fourth gates, and CF4 which was right down the Abbey Wood end of the Arsenal and not far from the 'danger buildings,' where explosives were handled. This is all now part of the Thamesmead Estate. These canteens were managed by female manageresses and I was always made a fuss of there. They had many items such as some sweets which were then unobtainable outside and I would leave the Arsenal laden down with gifts.

When the war was over the delivery rounds re-commenced and I would accompany dad once again, when possible, as his van boy. Being then some 13 years old I would have my own money bag, and it was not easy mentally working out the bill for those customers who

paid their bill weekly with large loaves then selling for four and a half old pence and small loaves for twopence three farthings. I wonder how present day 13 year olds would cope with that? Dad stayed with Chapman's until he fell out with Mr Chapman and moved into entirely different work.

I would like to mention that Mr Chapman, known generally to his intimates as 'Trucksy' due to some long forgotten childhood incident, had a son 'Dick'. He was called into RAF early in the war where he became a navigator on Wellington bombers. Unfortunately, his luck ran out and he was killed on only his 5th operational raid over Hamburg.

Editors notes below.

Another early Plumstead Bakers shop, on the corner of Speranza and Riverdale Roads. Photo from Les Parkins, whose grandfather, William Godwin, ran the bakery, somewhere around the 1920's-30's. The folk in the shop doorway are believed to be George Taylor the manager and his family.
Now completely gone with only a slight outline of the shops structure to be seen on Google maps on Street View.

Rosemarie Baghurst, A Few Childhood Memories

Rosemarie Baghurst, nee Finch

Rosemarie Finch, (later Baghurst) which I would guess is perhaps my first school picture and I started at Timbercroft when I was aged four, using a slate and chalk!

I grew up in Plumstead, from 1952–1961, and our home church is still the Slade Church on the Common. I lived in Southland Road and then Flaxton Road. My dad was born in a house on King's Highway. Sadly he passed away in December 2008. He could have shared many stories about his life in Plumstead. I will add a few of his wartime memories later.

Mum spent countless days and nights in the air raid shelter with her baby son Paul, whom dad did not meet until he was three years old. Paul then had quite the fright to find a strange man in bed with his mother one morning! Such was life in those days. Mum and dad didn't talk much about the war, with its sad memories, of friends lost, bombing and other such recollections.

I loved walking to the Common and playing 'hide and seek' among the many hawthorn bushes. The Swings were also a favourite playground and these were safe places to be. I was allowed out alone there, albeit very young, and there was a nurse always on duty should we fall off the horse or umbrella.

I loved the fish and chip shop in Kirkham Street. They would give me 4d of chips and a 1d for a gherkin and a 1d for an onion, but knowing I loved them so much the owners would add some free as a gift! This was every Thursday, on my way home from the Girls Brigade, and yes, I remember the parades around the streets and all the good times we enjoyed when living there! I would skip along with my father singing, "I want to be daddy's girl." We enjoyed school at Timbercroft where we even had scripture memory lessons.

My grandparents lived across the road from us and my great aunt at the top of Flaxton Road. She lived until she was in her nineties, so we would visit her often, even after we left the district. We still go back "home" fairly often, as I said, it is still our church where I was saved and where both my parents and our daughter were married – it has been a very significant influence in the lives of all our family.

Me with my brothers - your guess is as good as mine how old I was, but I remember the dress so well, my favourite - and no doubt my Sunday one.

We had some firm family traditions whilst growing up. One of the best was our weekly trip to Woolwich market where we would buy a pint of winkles and a half pint of cockles, and guess who did the winkles for tea while the football results were on the TV? Of course the Saturday meal was bangers and mash with peas and the thick gravy soaked up by bread. Other favourite foods in those days were the peas pudding and the bread with dripping sprinkled with salt, an economic form of spread. We had a pet chicken in the garden for eggs and I was heartbroken when it was killed., but I too remember the rabbits we had to eat, as that was a cheap meat. My parents were both wise and frugal, a direct result of all their wartime experiences with ration cards.

My favourite story is of my brother who told me there was a "manhole" on the common, which was a tunnel and if I found it I could go all the way to Woolwich, so I spent hours and hours looking for this tunnel that never existed. I suppose he thought it was a good way to keep me occupied, but he is a tease, even today.

Another favourite occupation was to go down to the town ferry and travel across the Thames on it, and then we would run back through the tunnel – only to go back across on the ferry again! In those days the boats were so interesting and the staff did not mind us going downstairs to watch the engines at work.

However, my favourite place on all the earth was the Rockcliffe gardens, which are now desolate and locked up. I would plead with

my brothers to take me there as you were not allowed entrance unless a certain age. There were caretakers, gardeners and public conveniences, along with a small café selling ice cream. I loved the stepping stones that crossed the once flowing water. The weeping willows left a deep impression on my childlike mind and it was my fairyland, or my dreamland, if you will.

Those early days have played a formative part in our lives, shaping our thoughts and actions and I sincerely thank God for the wonderful heritage I have, in growing up in the suburbs of post war London.

I remember dad spoke little of the war, but he taught me even when you don't have soap, hot water does work! Here are a few of his recollections that he passed on to family members in his latter days:

Me with my pet dog Toby. I loved that dog and was devastated when dad returned home without him one day as he finally had to be 'put down'. (We had a cat that lived to 16 as well) It was around 1954 at a guess.

Mark's (my dad) Wartime Memories

At the beginning of World War II I was a clerk on the railway in London, until March 1941 when, after volunteering, I was accepted into the Royal Air Force.

Between September 1939 and March 1941 I had many experiences of the "dogfights" as they were known, between British and German fighter and bomber planes. On one occasion the Repair Shops, in which I worked, were hit by a bomb in a daylight raid and a workman was killed. Another time, I was on my allotment, on Belvedere Marshes, when six Italian bi-planes came up the River Thames; all were shot down.

In the RAF, after a few weeks of drill discipline, I was sent with other fellows to Cosford, in Shropshire, where for sixteen weeks I was trained to be an airframe mechanic, then, after a two week break, I returned for a six week conversion course to become an airframe fitter (a higher grade).

In November 1941 I was sent to Manston aerodrome in Kent, where for a year and eight months I helped to 'service' fighter aircraft for their

raids into France and other enemy territories.

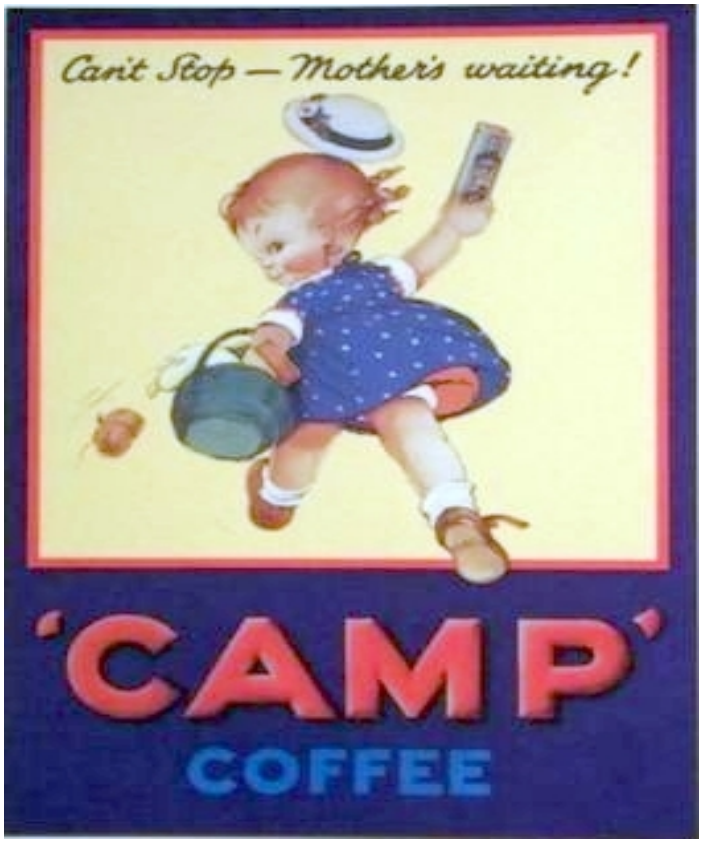
In the summer of 1943, there were two occasions when night flying German fighter planes landed by mistake and were quickly prevented from taking off again by RAF Regiment armoured trucks stationing themselves in front of them.

The German pilots did not have such good navigational instruments or training as the British and, having crossed the Thames Estuary from Essex to Kent, they thought they had crossed the Channel and thought they were in France.

In July 1943, I was sent to Algeria (a French colony) in North Africa where, until June 1945, I worked on Beaufighter and other aircraft at a large Maintenance Unit, situated on a plateau in the Atlas Mountain Range. We all lived in tents; there was no need for mosquito nets over us because of the altitude. In fact, we had snow from December 1944 to March 1945 and that was after a plague of locusts in the summer of 1944.

From July to February 1945 I was serving in Italy and from there I went to Athens in Greece until I was sent home for demobilisation in June 1946.

I was then able to see my son of 3¼ years, who was only four months old when I left England.



Saturday 7th Sept. 1940

John Matthews

Saturday, 7th Sept 1940.

This was the worst day of my life, for on that first Saturday in September, 1940, the Blitz began. The Blitz was when the Germans switched from daylight raids on military targets to heavy bomber raids at night on the main cities. This was what Churchill referred to as the 'Battle of Britain'. a battle in which civilians found themselves caught up in front-line warfare for the first time.

That first raid took London completely by surprise. Many buildings were hit, five hundred died and every railway out of London south of the river was cut. It was one of the worst raids suffered in the war. Until recently I had been unable to talk about it; now it just seems like a bad dream, but one in which every detail sticks in my mind.

It was on that day, of all days, that my mother and father decided to take me to the cinema, the first time in my life I had seen a film. I could not imagine what a film was. My father tried to explain, but it made no sense: I had no idea what would happen in the cinema. Our destination was the Odeon in Woolwich, a bad choice, for it lay just up the road from the Woolwich Ferry, opposite the Royal Docks and close to the main gate of Woolwich Arsenal. Since the purpose of the raid was to wipe out the City of London and the dockland industrial belt along the river, we were caught right in the middle.

It was the early evening performance so we must have got to the cinema at about four o'clock. The film had just started when a caption appeared on the screen to warn the audience that the sirens had sounded. A few people got up and walked out, but most stayed put. We had paid some 9d (3p) for our seats and did not want to throw good money away. The noise of the air-raid soon drowned out the film. We could hear bombers overhead and bombs exploding nearby, the rattle of anti-aircraft fire, but most worrying were the bells and sirens on the fire-engines and ambulances that roared past on the main road outside. More and more people walked out. I guess the cinema ended up about half full.

But I was far more worried about the film than the air-raid. By this time air-raids were old hat: a film was something completely new. I was too young to understand the difference between reality and make-believe. To me what was happening on the screen was real, after all, I could see it with my own two eyes, so it had to be happening. The film was called 'The Bluebird'. I can still recall one scene quite vividly of a small boy and girl (Shirley Temple actually), dressed like Hansel and Gretel, running through a burning forest. Trees were crashing in flames behind them. This really scared me: I was certain they were going to get killed.

Then a stick of incendiary bombs came through the roof.

We were lucky. I can remember a lot of vivid white smoke and there was a peculiar smell, which was probably the burning magnesium in the bombs. Then there was total pandemonium. People were screaming and rushing for the doors. I saw people on fire.

The thing I most admired about my father was that he was completely unflappable. Not once

did I see him lose control. Consequently, he was a good person to have around when there was a real emergency. When everyone else was panicking, he would remain calm and apply common sense to the situation. And that is what happened on this occasion. My mother and I just wanted to rush out like everyone else, but my father held us down in our seats and said, "No, don't move. It's suicidal."

So we were forced to remain there and watch the chaos around us for what seemed a long time, though it was probably only a minute or two. Then, when things had quietened down somewhat, my father said, "All right. Let's go," and we walked out into the foyer.

It was in darkness, but one could see what was going on from the light of the searchlights and fires outside. There were wounded people lying on the floor and couples crying. There were also three officials blocking the doorway, stopping anyone getting out into the street. I'm not sure whether they were police or air-raid wardens, but they had tin hats on and dark uniforms. So we stood there, like everyone else, uncertain what to do, again for what seemed a long time, until a HE bomb landed on the shops on the other side of the street. There was a deafening bang and a tremendous 'whoosh' as broken glass was flung across the room. The blast knocked the three doormen flat on their faces: I do not know whether they were killed or simply knocked out. My father shouted, "Jump," and we jumped over them and ran down the road to a surface shelter. It stood in the middle of the street by Woolwich ferry.

It was, of course, crowded, but somehow we managed to squeeze in and were stuck there for some six hours. It was impossible to talk because there was so much noise going on outside, and every time a bomb exploded nearby the whole building rocked. I remember an air-raid warden coming in with a bucket of cold water and an enamel mug. He asked whether anyone would like a drink. I said, "Yes, yes please," but my mother said, "Of course you don't want a drink. Don't be silly," and I never got my drink. I think she was worried that if I had a drink I would be demanding next to go to the toilet...

The all-clear went at about eleven. We went outside and stood on the riverbank. It was an unforgettable sight. There were wrecked and burning buildings all around, and an orange glow in the sky almost turned night into day. From St Paul's for a distance of about nine miles down the river virtually every building was ablaze. On the other side of the river, a little higher up the Thames, a warehouse was burning. As we watched its wall slumped down into the water. There were barges drifting down the Thames on fire. There was also a sickly sweet smell, which, I have since learnt, was probably burning sugar in the warehouses.

Then we walked up toward the main crossroads. I saw a boot in the road with something sticking out of it and paused to look. My mother dragged me away saying, "It's only an old shoe." But it wasn't: it was a shiny-new boot with part of someone's leg in it. At Beresford Square a tram appeared miraculously. We jumped aboard. I can remember the sound of the metal wheels grinding the broken glass in the street as we went along, but then my memory goes a complete blank: I think I must have fallen asleep.

My father told me, years later, that we only covered about 200 yards on the tram, because the street was blocked by firemen's hoses. We had to walk some five miles home and didn't arrive till just before dawn. No doubt my parents thought the house would be just a pile of

rubble. In fact it was completely untouched. I do have a vague memory of me staggering about in the middle of the street like a drunkard and my father telling me to walk properly. I was whining that I was too tired. I just wanted to lie down in the road and go to sleep. I think he must have carried me most of the way home.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

Schools For All

The School Board for London, formed after the 1870 Education Act, had responsibility for education within the Metropolitan Board of Works district. Thus, education in Plumstead became the responsibility of the new Board. Previously, children had attended church schools, such as, St Margaret's School, built in 1856 on Plumstead Common (Plumstead Central School), or Christ Church School, built in1857 on Shooters Hill.

Among the earliest Board Schools to be built in Plumstead were: Bloomfield Road; Burrage Grove; Brewery Road and Plumstead High Street. The Slade School of 1884 was designed by the famous School Board for London architect Edward R Robson. By 1910 there were about ten state schools in Plumstead. The original names of these schools are used above but they were all subsequently renamed.

The School Board for London (often abbreviated to the SBL and known colloquially as the London School Board) was an institution of local government and the first directly elected body covering the whole of London.

The Elementary Education Act 1870 was the first to provide for education for the whole population of England and Wales. It created elected school boards, which had power to build and run schools where there were insufficient voluntary school places; they could also compel attendance. In most places, the school boards were based on borough districts or civil parishes, but in London the board covered the whole area of the Metropolitan Board of Works -- the area today known as Inner London.

Between 1870 and 1904, the SBL was the single largest educational provider in London and the infrastructure and policies it developed were an important influence on London schooling long after the body was abolished.

The original intention of the board was to provide a sufficient number of school places for the poorest children in London, which were originally estimated at little more than 100,000. The policy adopted by the SBL was to provide London with modern, high-quality schools, whilst compelling parents, by law, to educate their children. Although education would not be compulsory on a national level until 1880, the board passed a by-law in 1871 that compelled parents to have their children schooled between the ages of five and thirteen.

The SBL was largely successful in their aims and often struggled to keep up with the demand for their services. For instance, by the end of the 1880s, the board was providing school places for more than 350,000 children. This growth was frequently attributed to the quality of school premises, which were often far superior to those of private or charity schools. The board was responsible for constructing over four hundred schools across London, many of which are still in use.

The Board's first chief architect was Edward Robert Robson.

Abolition of the board

Although the school boards had been largely successful in increasing the number of children attending school in Britain, they were perceived as bureaucratic and expensive. As a response to this, the boards were abolished by the Education Act of 1902, which replaced them with Local Education Authorities.

In London, the London County Council had been created in 1889 to replace the Metropolitan Board of Works and in 1904 the responsibility for education in London was transferred to the LCC. The LCC itself was abolished in 1965, with education for the former School Board area passing to the Inner London Education Authority, a committee of the Greater London Council. The ILEA was abolished in 1990, with the inner London borough councils becoming education authorities.

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School Times Past

A look back at some early school photos

A bit bleak looking, early last century view of ***Church Manorway School*** *c.1910.*

Earl Rise School *c.1952. Diane Hagan is next to end left in front row.*

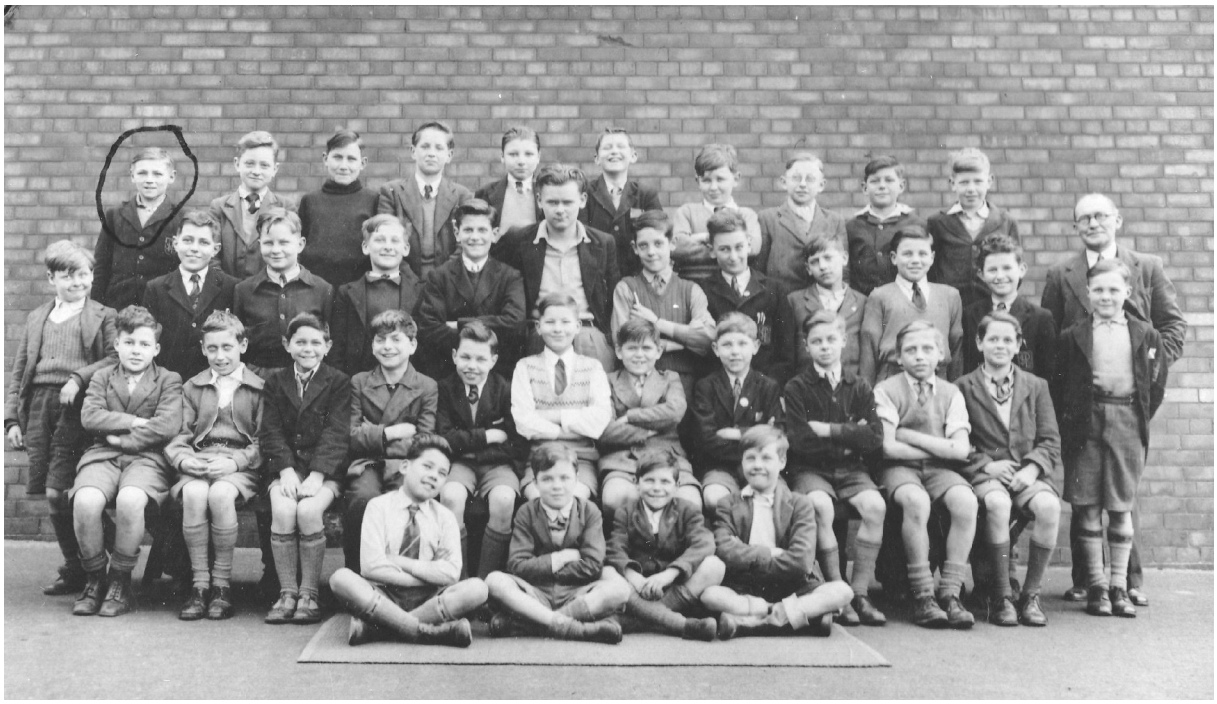
***Conway Road Primary School**. Mr Jenkins Class -1A- 1950. Note all the Cub and Brownie uniforms there are being worn. Photo: Sheila May Lee (nee Jordan)*

***Bloomfield School** around 1954, Mike Marsh is second left in back row.*

Wickham Lane Secondary Boys School *1948. Albert Riley is second row from the top, second from the left.*

Wickham Lane School *1951. Photo: Jim Millward.*

***Ancona School** 1935. WJ Sale (Bill).*



***Plum Lane School** 1950. Brian Whelan, circled.*

Waverley Girls School *Form 1B (1954/5) at Waverley School. Photo: Kathleen Smith.*
Top row from left to right: Christine Taylor, Jeanette Webster, Wendy Laden, Mary Walker, Margaret Bolton, Pearl Perry, Dorothy Hare, Catherine Alison.
Second row left to right: Patricia Higgs, Joan Mummery, Wendy Savage, Heather Benson. Vera Tanner, Jackie Lavery, Margaret Thornton. Barbara Haig, Florence Ott, Mary Glastonbury, Doreen Banks, (Me) Kathleen Green, Heather Anderson.
Next row sitting left to right: Sally Wells, Penelope Lang, ? ? Penny Lambert, Frances Heath, Pauline Ellis, Joan Hewson. Last row sitting left to right: Jackie Wood, Carol Colmer, Anne Hutchinson, Joan Salter, Anne Stannard, Pauline Ward, Jean Loder.

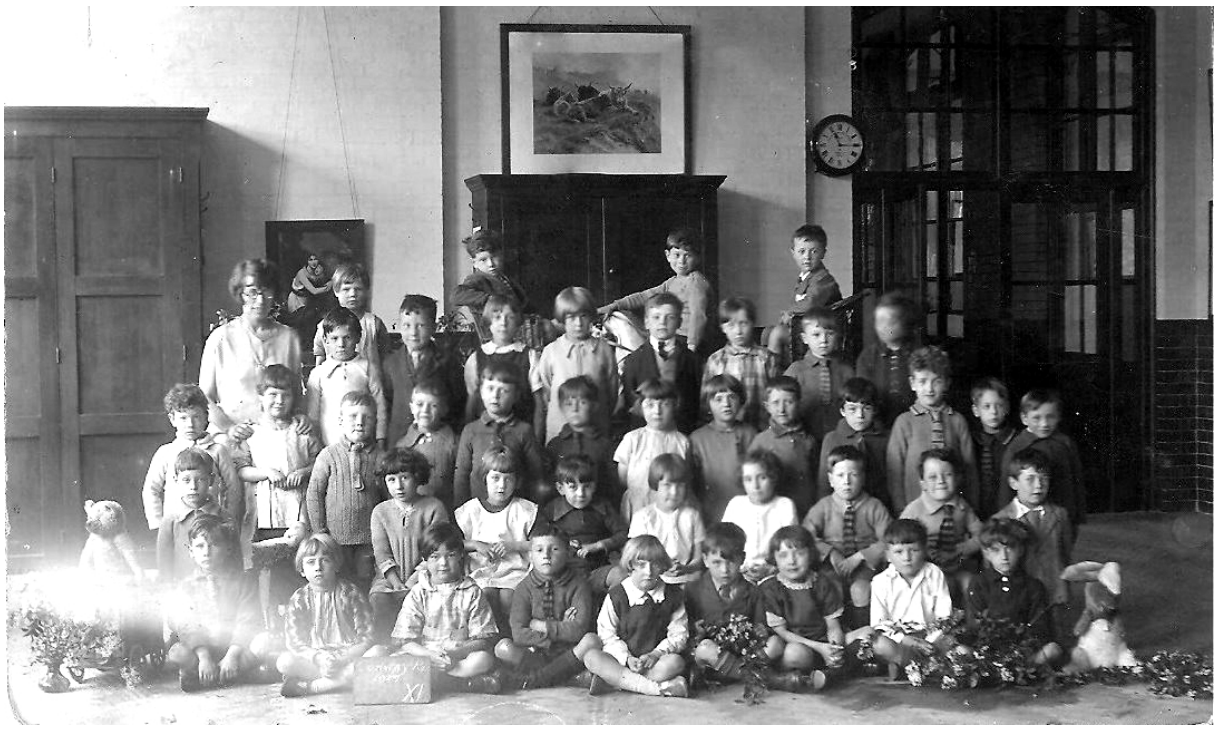
Burrage Road School *c.1953? A Christmas play and Val Daniels, nee Wren, is 2nd from left in front row. Photo was found in a Coronation QEII folder by Diane Hagan.*

Timbercroft School *1948. Brian Whelan, circled.*

Timbercroft School *c 1950. Mike Marsh is extreme right, front row.*

Timbercroft School *1958-59. Lyn Davidson nee Sales, recalls these names:*
Top Row: L – R. ?, Eden Dorban, ?, Edward Hart, Michael, Diana, Doreen.
Middle Row: Mr Monk, ?, ?, Linda, Lynda Sales, Maureen Welsh, ?, Mary, ?, Stephen.
Bottom Row: ?, ?, Victor, Brian Morris, ?, Linda, Linda, Janet Balley, Ann.

Conway Road School *1934, class group ten.* *Photo: Margaret Forbes.*



Conway Road School *1934, class group eleven. Photo: Margaret Forbes.*

Church Manorway School *c.1935. Katherine Smith's sister Pat is bottom right.*

Timbercroft School *Class 2a 1964.*

Back Row: Aland Webb, Susan Buss, Bunny Duberry, Melanie Hyam, Fred Denny Katherine Stansfield, Angela Beardsal, Linda Young, Jane ??

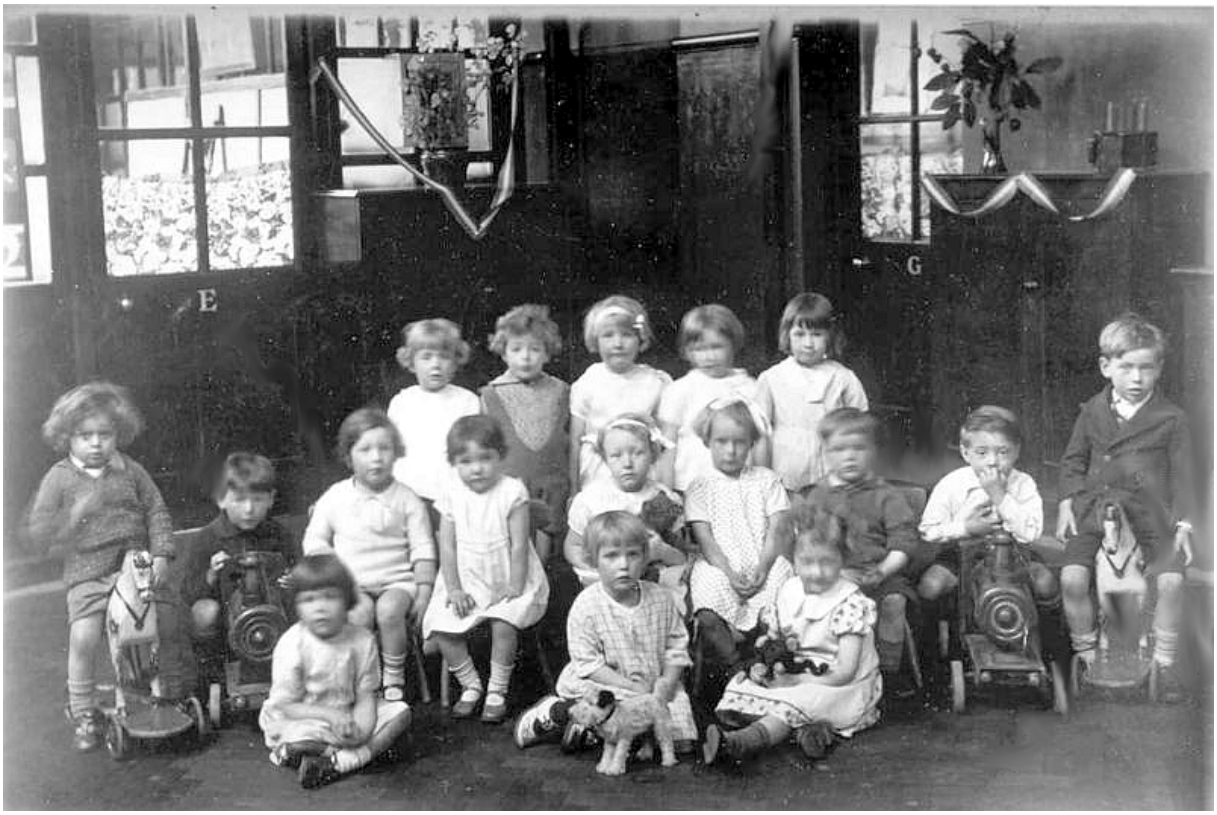
Next Row: Jane Steward, Angela Bailey, Sarah Nelson, Linda Plaistow, Andrew Strong, Mrs Prior, Lynne Elliot, Tony Parkinson, Roy McPherson, Brian Russell.

Next Row: Anon, Nigel Easterling, Jean House, Dave Garnsworthy, Christine Storey, Amanda Janes, Susan Wiggins, Susan Hubbard, Terry Thurley, Elaine Callow.

Front Row: Agatha McFoy, Liz Burnett, Patricia Howett, Tony Fields, Victor Parker, Graham Hindle, Wendy ??

Burrage Road Primary School *1953.Val Daniels is sitting in front row, 3rd from left my name then was Valerie Wren, the girl next to me, 2nd from left, was Jean Johnson my best friend for many years.*

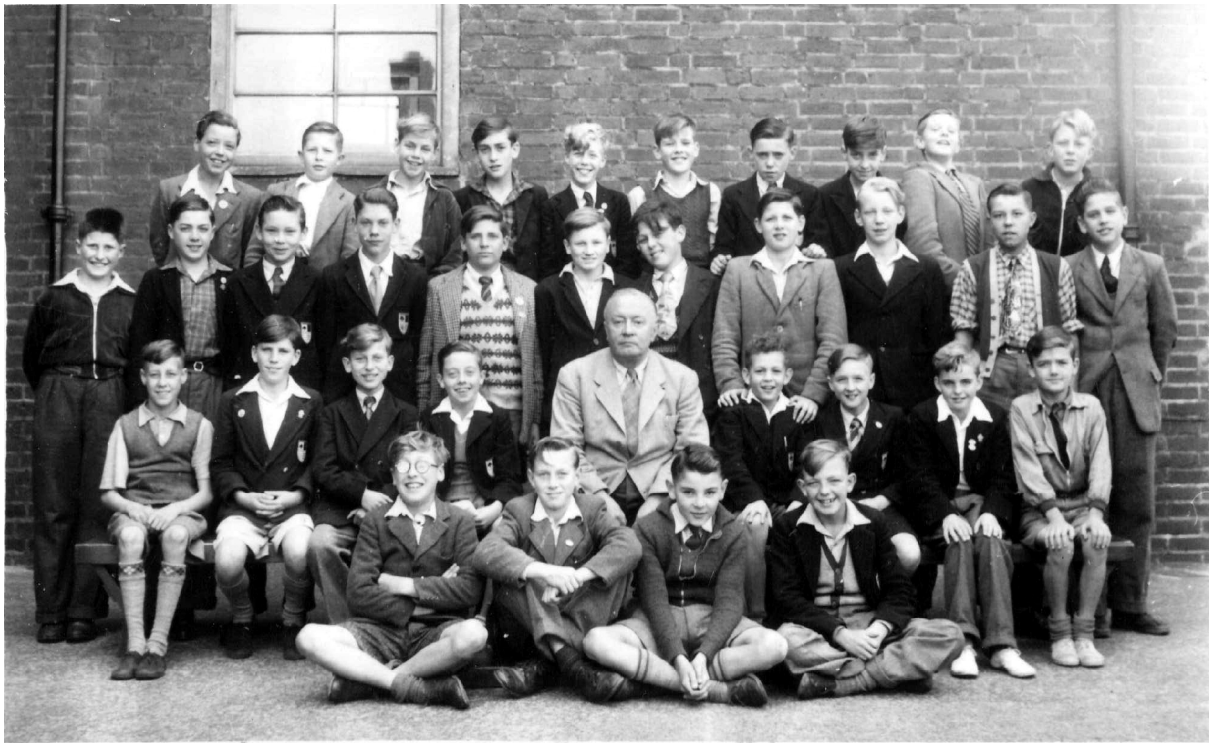
Photo from Diane Hagan.



Earl Rise nursery School *1935. The little boy sitting on the toy horse was my Brother Jim (sadly died in 1993) he was probably four years of age, taken in 1935, the decorations I assume were for King George 5th's Jubilee.*

Earl Rise Nursery School *1949. 'Here is the church, here is the steeple...' Both photos from Lesley Turner.*

Woolwich Polytechnic Boys School *Swimming Champions 1960-61.*



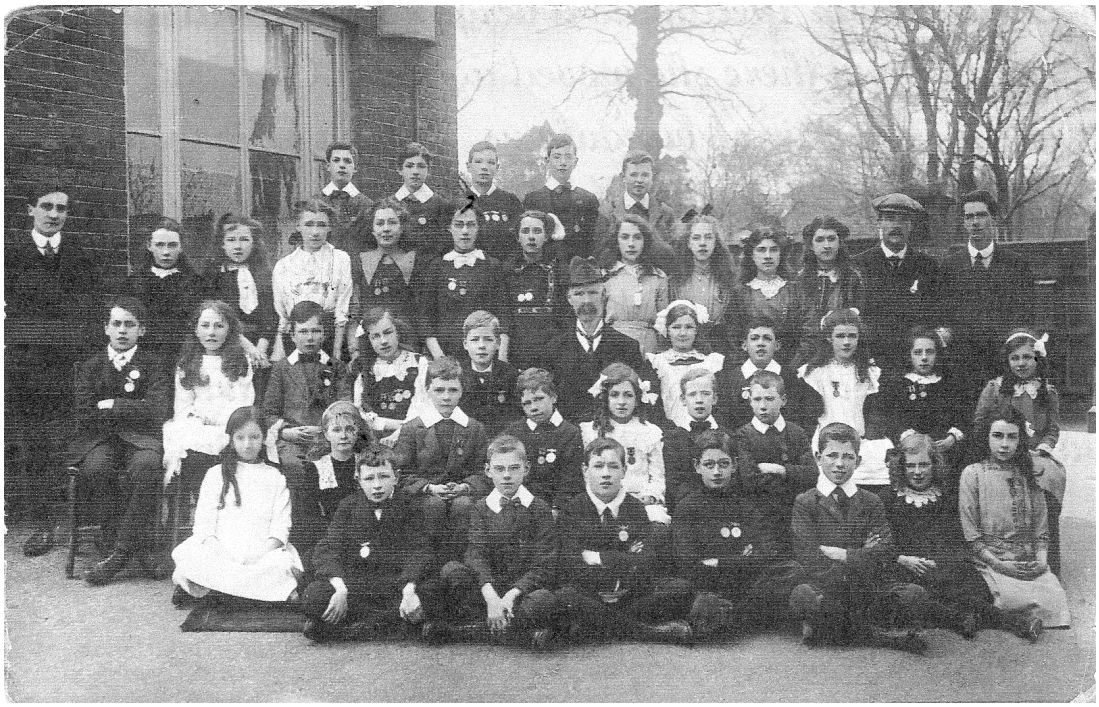
Wickham Lane Sec School*. Class, form 2a (Mr Waites, form teacher).*
Photo: Ken Rowden.

Woolwich School, later Bloomfield School *1949.* *Photo: Roger Legg.*

Conway Road Primary School *1933.*

Gallions Mount Primary School *1956.* *Photo: Ann Clarke.*

Earl Rise Primary School, *c.1955. John Scarrott is in the second row, forth from the left as you look at the picture. John says that his sister, Hazel Scarrott, and him used to live at 17 Oliver Street, which is all gone now in the 1960's.*



A ***Plumstead School*** *thought to be Conway, 1907.*
Robin Dobson, 2nd row from bottom, 2nd from left.

Snippets Of The Levett's

Terrance John Levett

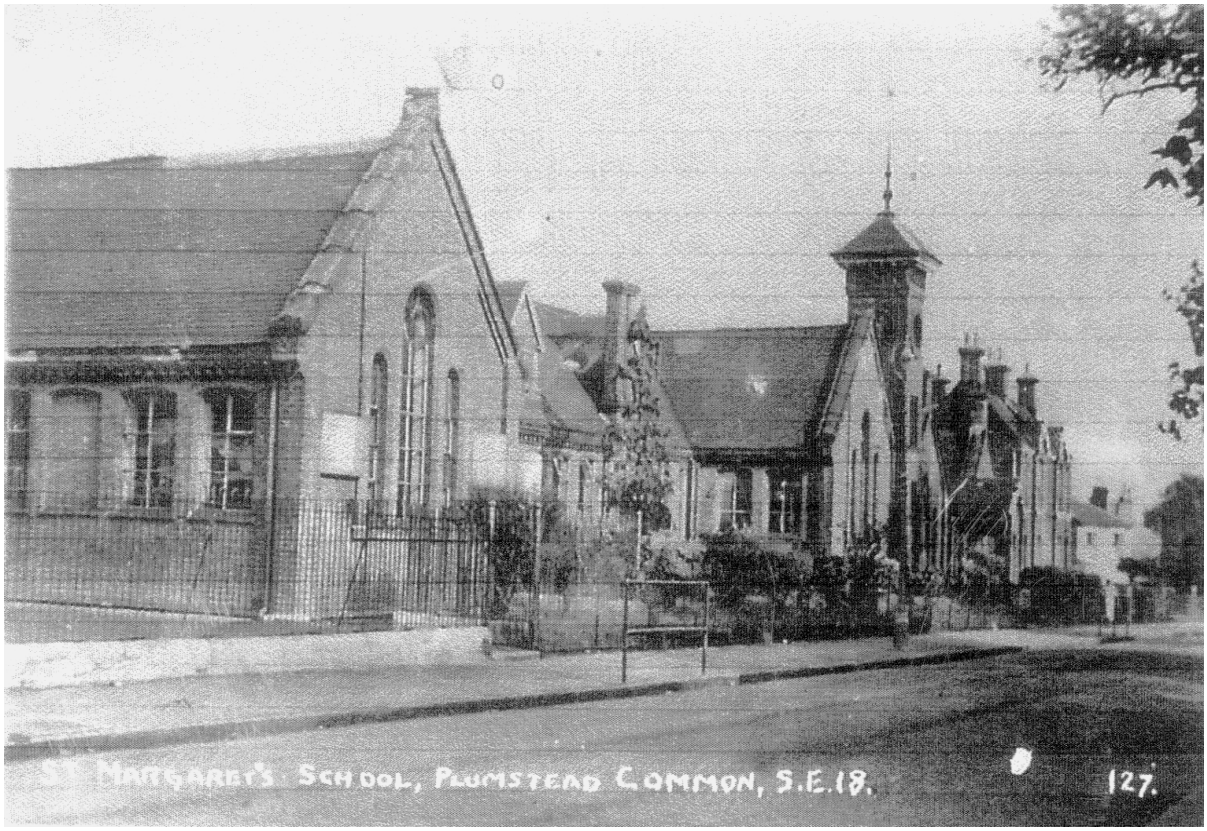
My name is Terrance John Levett and I was born in Paddock Wood in 1945. My parents house was No 9 Benares Road in Plumstead. My father was still in the army (RASC) at the time. He was demobbed in 1946.

My mother's parents lived at No 7, from 1925 to 1964. Their surname was Ahern. My grandfather was a farrier in the army, from 1904 till 1925 and his last posting was to Woolwich Barracks.

My father was born in Barth Road in Plumstead in 1912, where his parents and siblings lived.

I have an older brother Eddy, born in 1942 in Oxford and a younger sister Kathleen, born in 1948 in Paddock Wood. We moved from Benares Road to No 6 St Margaret's Terrace in Plumstead in 1949.

We all went to St Margaret's C of E School, as did our cousins, who lived in Maxey Road, which was over the back from us. Cuffs garage and stores was between the back gardens. (Cuffs Department shop was in Powis Street, Woolwich)



St Margaret's School, Plumstead Common.

My brother and me went to Bloomfield Sec Mod School for boys and my sister went to Burrage Road School for girls.

When I left school, in 1961, I got a job as an apprentice gas fitter, as did my brother. We were

based in Powis Street in Woolwich, behind the South Eastern Gas Board showrooms. I was there for six years and was now married. I got a transfer to the Midlands Gas Board in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, where my wife and extended family lived. We then moved to Northampton, where we now live.

Bloomfield Road School, 1st year, class 1 D 1956.
Back row, L-R: ?; Saul; ?; D Lambotte; ?; R Ives; ? Golding; Showel; ?; Gifford?; Helmore.
Middle row: Saunders; Sharp; Newton; T Levett; ?; D Rowlands; Peabody; A Mc Masters; ?; Race; ward.
Sitting: Maynard; Young; I Read; ?; Newbury; Mr Bishop; Cresswell; A Reed; T Jarvis; ?. Number in class 33 pupils.

When we were kids we used to play in the streets, as in those days there were very few cars on the roads. We also played on the Common and especially enjoyed playing on the bomb sites that were still scattered around the local areas. Some of these I recall, were on Hudson Road; St James Grove; (old school building). We also played in the field, between St Margaret's Terrace and Maxey Road, which was known to us kids as 'the 'nanny goat field.' To reach the nanny goat field you had to go down the alley steps that led to both streets. Maxey Road end had the Percy Arms pub on the corner and a shop on the other corner.

I can remember watching the films on Saturday afternoons in the summer, screened from the back of the mobile cinema van, on the Common, near the Band Stand in Bird's Nest Hollow, near to where the public toilets used to be. We played many enthusiastic games of football in the area by the drinking fountain which was by St Margaret's School.

Us kids would love going on day long adventures into Lesnes Abbey Woods and Bostall Woods and to Shrewsbury Park and played also in the Oxleas and Castle Woods. Many a happy day was spent on Winn's Common and at the paddling pool and playground there.

As kids we went to a few special events, such as the Tattoos and Open Days at the Woolwich Barracks and to the fairs that were held on the Woolwich Common. I was also in the Cubs, which was the 8th Woolwich pack, based in St Margaret's School.

Bloomfield Road School, 2nd year, Class 2 D.
Top row, L to R: D Rowlands; I Ried; Newton; Newbury; Lambotte; Race; T Levett; Ward; Sharp.
Middle row: T Jarvis; M Evans; Mackintosh; Golding; Robins; Saul; Gifford; Helmore; Saunders; Showel.
Sitting: Maynard; Corbett; Young; A Reed; Mr Williams; Creswell; Innis; A McMasters; Peabody.
Number in class 27.

We went on many trips and a favourite for us kids was a trip across the Thames on the Woolwich Free Ferry to North Woolwich, and then we'd come back through the foot tunnel.

When I was a bit older, I remember meeting my mates in the cafés in the Hollow, on Plumstead Common Road. I recall The Hilltop, Crescent Road and the local pubs; Bramblebury Arms; The Old Mill; The Ship; The Star; The Woodman: The Who 'da Thought It; The Prince of Wales and others. Then we moved on to owning motorbikes and going out to Johnson's cafe, on the A20 near West Kingsdown in Kent and also the Dutch House pub.

I met my future wife (Dono) about this time. She lived in Kelham House in Barnfield Gardens in Plumstead. We got married in 1967 and lived in Pellipar Gardens in Woolwich, until we later moved to Northamptonshire in late 1967.

Some Childhood Possessions

Mark Weightman

A kids we valued our few possessions. When I was growing up I owned a catapult, a bird egg collection that I had collected myself, and, if you could get one, a fish tank. We went to Danson Park to fish for our minnows and sticklebacks.

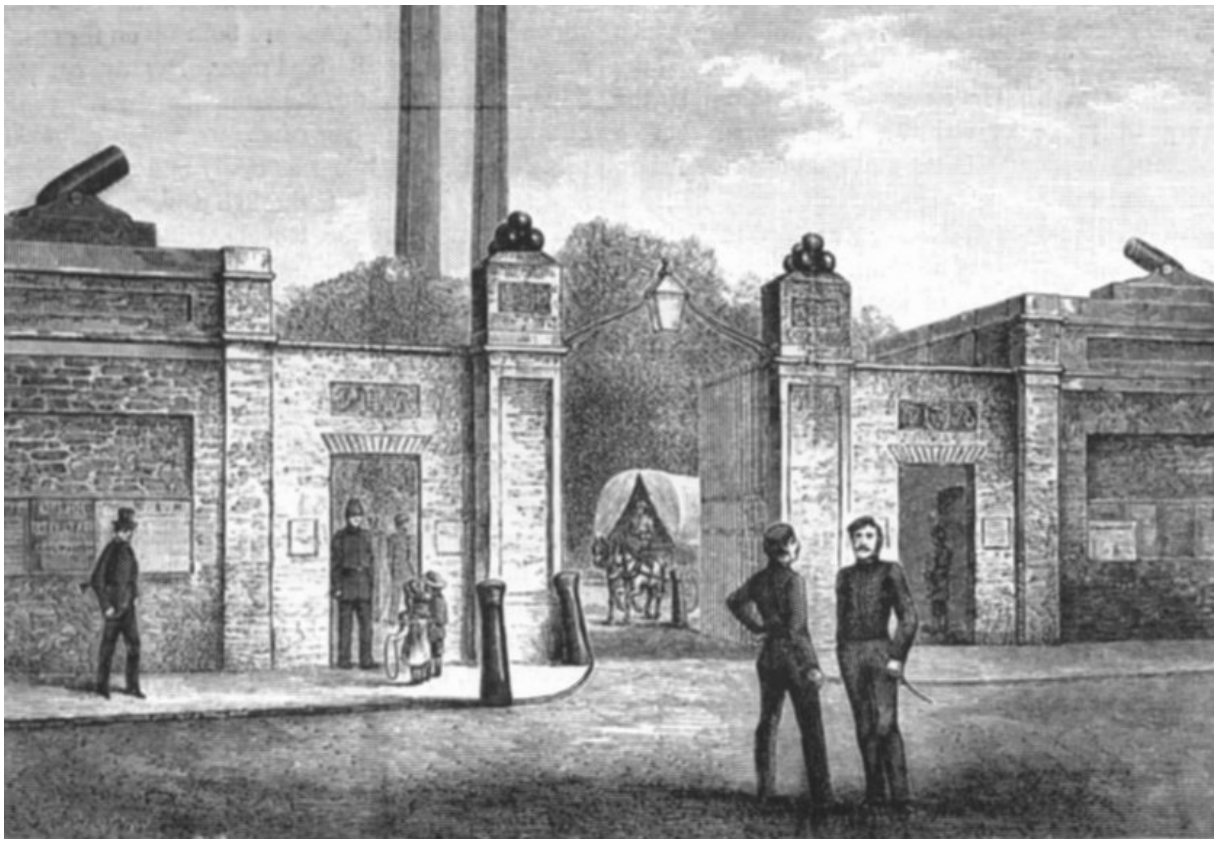
At the end of World War II, as a kid of about six, when I arrived home from school, I got a wonderful surprise when my mum said to me "Look in the front room, Mark" Well, there it was, my Irish cousin Danny had brought me a new football from Ireland. He had served in the RAF, one of 13 children from County Clare. I was mad on football and I went on to play for and to captain the school team.

To be honest I was so lucky. My grandmother, dad's mother, left a small legacy and I benefited. I became the very proud owner of a brand new bike, a black enamelled C.W.S.(Royal Arsenal Cooperative Society) roadster. Dad said that a sports drop handlebar bike was far too dangerous. Kids would call out when I rode the bike "Tin Cheque Island!" Purchases through their shops at the R.A.C.S. resulted in a yearly paid out dividend, eight pence in the pound as I remember once. Our mother said she clothed us kids on the Co-op divi.

Mark with his CWS roadster next to the cricket pitch on Plumstead Common c.1949?

I polished that bike regularly. Mum and dad were very impressed that after four years of owning that bike it still looked almost as new, even though I went everywhere on it.

Alfred Smith Blacksmith at Woolwich Barracks before 1900.



Arsenal Gates 1880 from old print.

Early cabinet card photograph taken at N. Cassinello, Woolwich photographic studios.

Boys life Brigade, East Plumstead Baptist Church Whit Monday 1913.

Butchers shop in New Road, Woolwich, 1907.

Horse drawn fire wagon, Sun Street Fire Station, Shooters Hill in late Victorian era.

Green Farm, Woolwich.

A very early photograph.

Munition Arsenal workers. Photo by The Tasma Studios 99 Wellington Street, Woolwich.

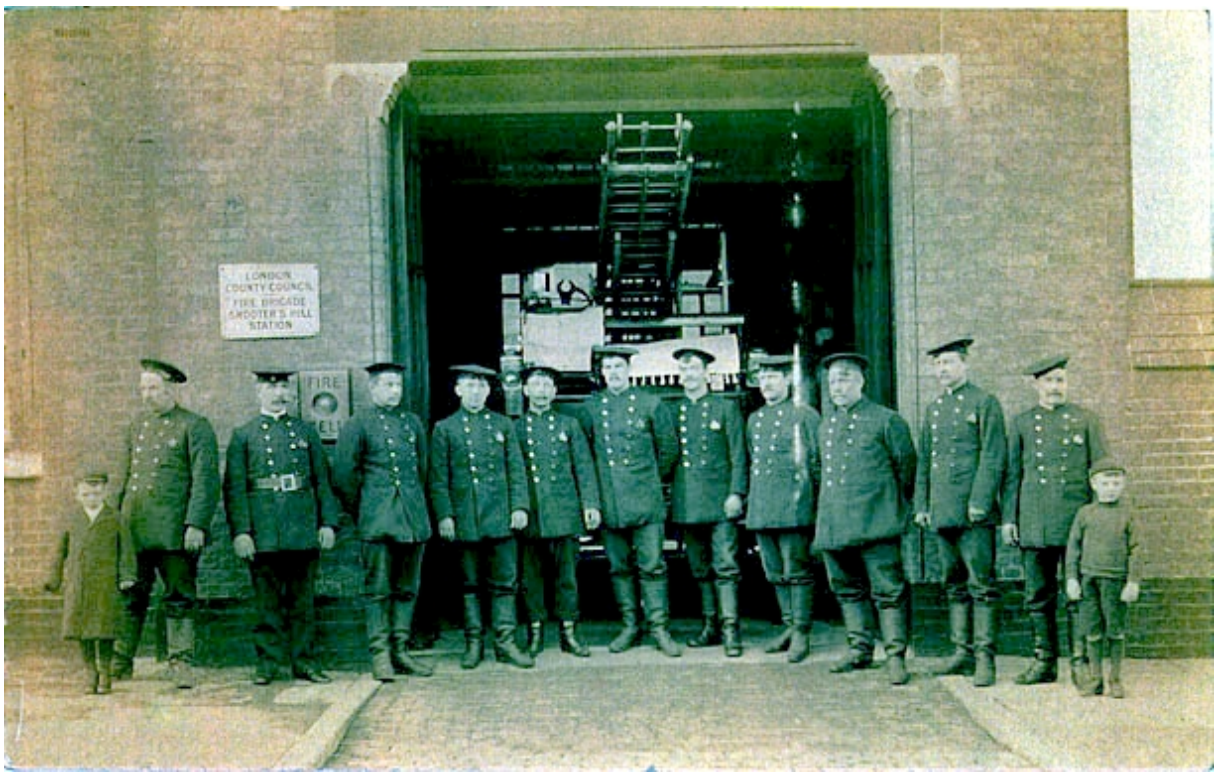
Nile Street, Woolwich, 1880. From very early print.

North Woolwich Railway Station Great Eastern, an early photo.

The One O'Clock Gun, Woolwich 1918.

Plumstead Brotherhood Garden Party 27th July 1912.
The Very Ugly Mug Parade. A bit too much for the camera.

Young Royal Military Cadets Woolwich.



Firemen at the old Fire Station Shooters Hill, Woolwich.

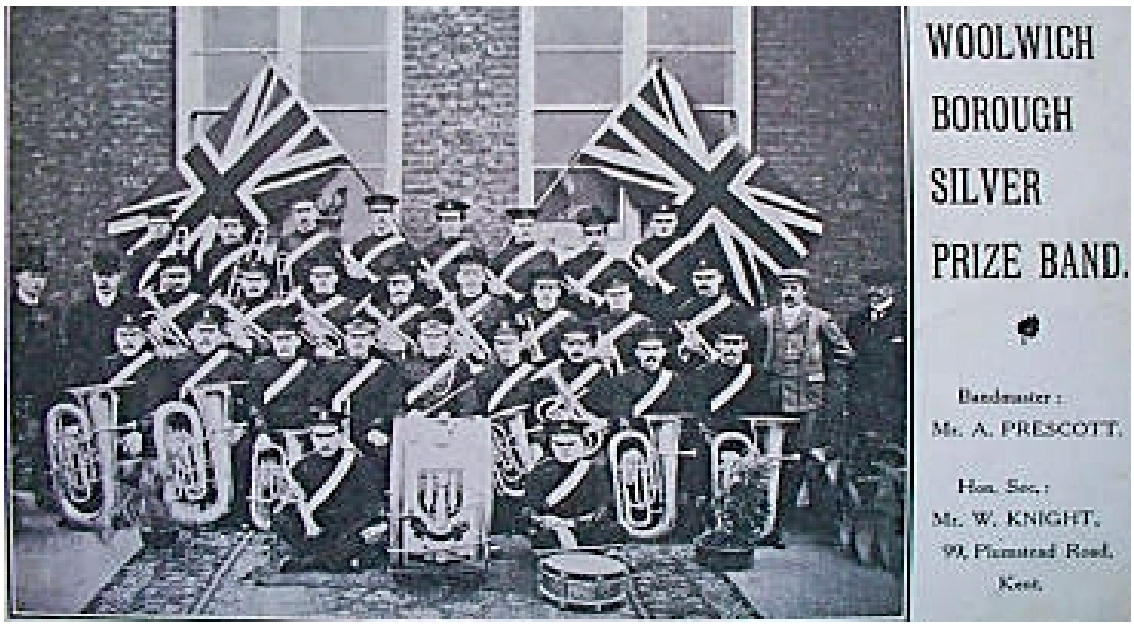
Shewsbury Lane in Wintertime. An early photo. Thank to: e-shootershill.co.uk

Trams at the Woolwich Free Ferry Terminus.

Wall's Ice Cream Tricycle. 'Stop Me and Buy One.'

Western Electric Company North Woolwich Football buses 1913.

Woolwich Borough Council Road Sweepers.



Brass Band Silver prize winners Woolwich.

Woolwich Dockyard Gates. Tram, plus a Horse drawn bus.

Woolwich Free Ferry passengers on vessel Duncan in Edwardian times.

Woolwich Rock Dept works trip 1920's at Cunis Garage meet.

Charabanc Beano, on an outing to Margate. *Photo Lesley Turner.*

Charblanc Beano on an outing to Margate. *Photo David Allen.*

Charablanc outing, Prince Albert Pub, Raglan Street, 1920's.

Charablanc outing, outside of Thomas Edge, Woolwich.

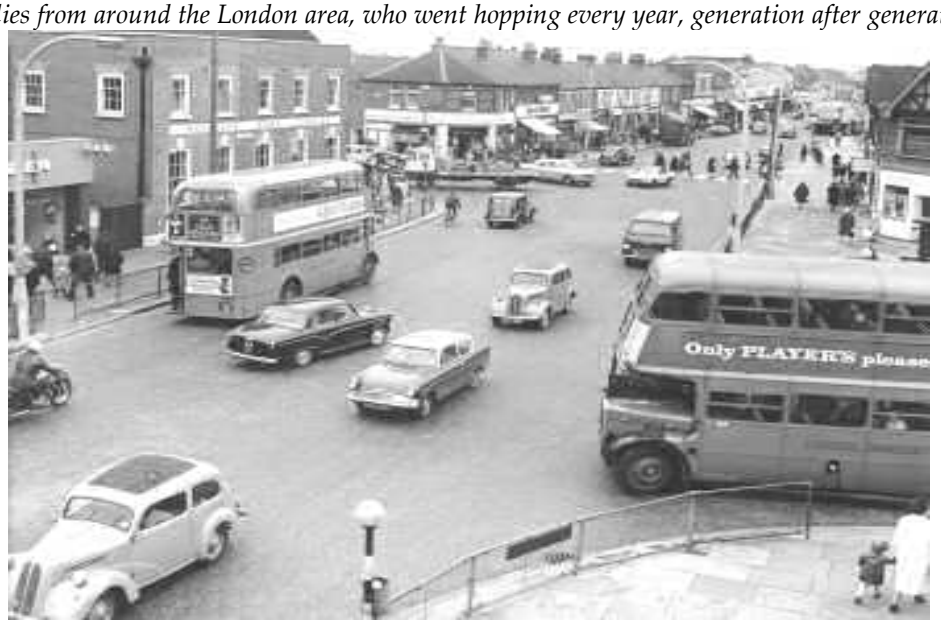
Charablanc outside shop of Bert Smith.

Chimney Sweeps with their hand cart with brushes and cane polls.

Horse drawn tram leaving Beresford Square, late Victorian era.

Horse Drawn UD (United Diaries) Milk float, possibly in the Woolwich Road area.

Hop Picking in the Kent Hop Fields. Many Folk from the Plumstead and Woolwich areas included went hopping as a working holiday that gave the kids and the adults a holiday in the country side and a few extra bob. Though it was hard work and with very basic, often rough living, everyone mucked in, along with the many rag & bone families from around the London area, who went hopping every year, generation after generation.



Welling Corner, Welling 1963.

Woolwich Free Ferry, the vessel Gordon is pulling out, 1956.

Will Crooks, Woolwich Ferry paddle boat built 1930.

Woolwich Free Ferry. Directing traffic on the vehicle deck 1956.

Woolwich Ferry, viewed from another ferry boat.

Trams awaiting their sad fate at the scrap yard in Charlton.

The Brewery Tap pub and shops in Lakedale Road Plumstead. Long demolished.
Photo: Alan Gibbs.

Danson Park, an aerial view 1963.

The Swimming Pool, Danson park, Welling 1938.

New Road Tram Terminus, Woolwich, c1930. Photo: Joe Duncan.

Royal visit to Woolwich, 1913. Arrival at the Woolwich Town Hall.

Eaton Electrical Co Ltd lorry with a large coil Woolwich.

Eltham High Street in the 1930's.

Early photo of the Slade Ravine, Plumstead Common, with the Slade School in the distance.
There has been a lot more growth nowadays of trees and shrubs since this early shot was taken.

St Margaret's C of E School, 1950-1956

Christopher Martyn

With a birthday falling in the Christmas holiday period, I was able to start school within days of turning five. No one started any younger than that in those days.

St Margaret's School in the mid 1990's.

St Margaret's School was – and still is – just across the Common from where we lived; three-minute's walk away. The building dates from 1856. It has a wealth of pitched roofs and is of red brick, the material normally used in London for public buildings like police stations, libraries and schools. Houses like ours on the other hand were mostly built with a distinctive yellow brick, manufactured in the Kent clay fields. There were solid walls within the school, but a surprising number of rooms were separated by partitions made of wood, with the top third glazed. These, not so-soundproof partitions, were hinged and folded back, concertina-style, to create a larger room if needed. The Assembly Hall doubled as the dining room, with a kitchen at one end. I always went home for lunch. Meals were cooked at a larger school in the borough, delivered warm in metal containers and served in smaller schools like ours. Each afternoon the smell of institutional food would hang in the hall; not very pleasant during 'Music and Movement', singing or country dancing, the dominant odour was boiled cabbage, with high notes of steamy suet.

The boys of Class 1 in July 1955, i.e. the leavers.
Their names are as follows:Rear L to R: John Cale, Richard Jones, John Crawford, Peter Childs, Mr B Van Eyck, Peter Turner, Peter Coxidge, Charlie Taylor.
Centre L to R: Frank Bland, John Bland, John Wright, Alan Carne, John Dick, Keith Orman, Colin Hand.
Front L to R: Tony White, John Prendergast, Ronnie Ham, Alan Goddard, Howard Lambie, Barry Atkins, Michael Tarrant, Tommy Morris.

Until I was about ten the Headmistress had no office but sat on a platform at one end of the Hall. On the corner of her desk sat one of the brass hand-bells that were used to signal the end of morning or afternoon school. Hers had a polished wooden handle; the others had leather straps for handles and were used by the duty teacher at playtime. The part-time school secretary sat at a desk ninety degrees to the platform, on the lower floor level. There were eight classes altogether, numbered from No 8 for the five-year-olds to No 1 or 'Top Class', for those in their final year. These numbers were painted on the pink classroom doors. Three rooms were adjacent the Hall, others in a row along one side; the Staff Room at the end., in among them were the cloakrooms. Toilets were outside in the yard and pretty foul they were. Joined to the school was a covered passageway under the bell-tower and another hall where the Cubs and Scouts met each week. In the playground we enjoyed competitive games like Tag, (or 'It' as we kids said) and marbles and conkers. We also flicked a series of cigarette-cards at a solitary card propped against a wall; if you dislodged it then that card was yours. There was no gymnasium. 'Organised games' and P.E. were in the playground. The Common was used for football or athletics.

Our Head Teacher was Miss Clarice M Bratton. She started on the same day as me. Red hair, conspicuous make-up and high-heeled shoes, she was in no way your traditional schoolmarm. I believe she was from 'up north', a Geordie possibly; to kids who had rarely ventured across the Thames, this made her pretty exotic. Her predecessor, Mrs Greatorex, had retired. We imagined Mrs G as being like one of Dickens' formidable characters - Josiah Bounderby's mother or Miss Murdstone - who would rap you over the knuckles with a wooden ruler if you so much as smirked or blotted your work. I am sure she was a lovely old

lady; children are quick to suspect the worst with adults in authority, with good reason. I recall thinking how much nicer it was to have the comparatively youthful and smiling Clarice in charge.

I had a procession of teachers starting in Class 8 with Mrs Fairbairn and in Class 7 with Miss Turnbull. Most of the women there were grey-haired and over 50. These two were extremely kind, motherly types. How different Miss Thrift in our Class 6. She had no qualms in using corporal punishment. Rarely a day went by without at least one hapless child getting slapped on the upper arm. But she had her compensations; she was a gifted artist and delighted us with her many drawings, often of animals and birds, in coloured chalks on the blackboard. She had a florid complexion, short straight hair and favoured kilts secured near the hem with a large pin.

After Miss T it was out of the Infants and into the juniors; that meant Miss Webber, arguably the strictest teacher in the school. In her class we had a test every Friday afternoon. Once the test papers had been marked you had to stand in a line across the front of the room in descending order of your scores; top dogs nearest the window and dunces in the shadows by the door. Among other things, I recall working with coloured skeins of raffia in her craft lessons. We sat at double desks. One day, the boy I sat next to, leaned over his side of the desk and was copiously sick on the floor. Galvanised by an absolute horror of vomiting, I slid away from him off the seat onto the floor! Someone being sick meant that a messenger must be sent to Mr Kilpatrick, the Caretaker, who would show up minutes later with his bucket of sawdust and a shovel. I offered to run the message and was on my feet quickly and was very glad to flee the smell and sight of someone's returned lunch.

Next up from Miss Webber was Mr Stone, a younger member of staff. His room was in a particularly gloomy corner of the school that always needed the lights on. He was interested in 'nature' as there were glass containers with specimens on all the windowsills, like hyacinths and stick insects. Wanting to make my contribution to the display I trapped a Red Admiral butterfly in a jam-jar. The jar was placed on the ledge and I felt very proud. Imagine my horror when the next day I saw it was empty and the paper lid torn back, obviously by someone who thought what I had done was cruel. A big event that year was being moved up into the next class after only a few months. There were three of us; Carol McKenna, Keith Britter, who was to become my best friend, and I. We were deemed to be the brightest in the class and able to cope with being 'accelerated' through the school. The post-war 'bulge', what we call Baby Boomers, was in full swing. Schools were oversubscribed and overcrowded and space had to be created wherever possible. The classes at St Margaret's were pretty big anyway. There were forty-four children in Top Class in my final year.

So I found myself in Tom Callard's class. I tried to win his approval, but I was often on the wrong side of him. His 'thing' was drama and in December that year I was picked to be the Angel Gabriel in an improvised nativity play. Most of the boys thought all angels were female (even those with male names) because they traditionally wore 'dresses' and long hair, and I was mocked for that. But worse was my shameful inability to utter any words when I was 'on'. Tom obviously thought I knew what to say, but I had paid scant attention during the preparatory lessons. I stood at the front of the class, arms spread wide, gazing down at the pretty Kathleen Buck, *aka* Mary, and not a word came out of my mouth. I was

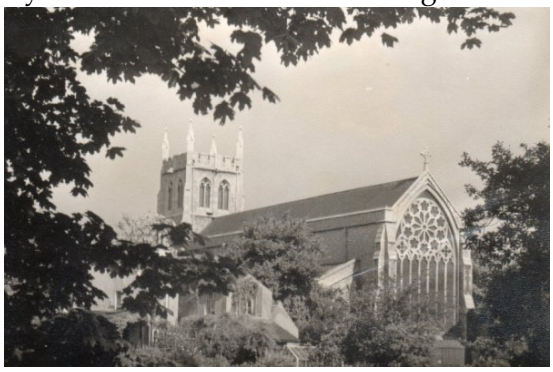
dumbstruck. “Christopher Martyn!” hissed Mr Callard. “Sit down. You just can’t be trusted, can you?”

Tom Callard was a published author and we were furiously proud of him. Under the name of Sutherland Ross, he wrote several children’s novels, extracts from which he read out in class to us. There were *Three Steps to Tyburn* and *A Masque of Traitors*, both historical pieces, and *The Lazy Salmon Mystery.* I still have the copies he signed for me. When you look at the photo of the 1955-56 school football team, with me in the back row, wearing the white high-necked goalkeeper’s jersey, you can see that Tom looks a thoroughly decent chap; a bit shabby but genial. How different the other male teacher in the picture; Bernard van Eyck, immaculately turned out in double-breasted jacket and sporting a regimental tie. It was Mr van Eyck (‘Van’) who actually trained the team, why Tom was in the picture I don’t know.

By virtue of being moved quickly through the junior school I skipped Van’s class altogether, though we had him for Art while the girls went to Mrs Mattey for needlework. Like Miss Thrift, he was also a slapper. As punishment, you stood on your desk, he’d then push one leg of your shorts up and deliver a smack on the thigh. He often wandered off to visit colleagues in adjacent classrooms during lessons. When he heard his class making a racket he would stride over to the high windows, rap on the glass with a door key and glare at us. His walk was slow, measured and punctuated by the click of ‘blakeys’ or ‘segs’ nailed to the toes and heels of his shoes.

It was in Van’s art classes that we made a calendar to take home and give to our parents at Christmas. He provided stiff card and wall-paper to cover it; the tiny calendar for the next year, a loop of ribbon to hang it and the picture we pasted onto the card, chosen from his box of last year’s Christmas cards. I chose a photograph of an alpine scene with an intense blue sky and a clump of birch trees beside the lake. I was very pleased with this. It proudly hung on the larder door for two years, being updated after the first year.

Because of my hasty promotion in school I arrived in Top Class aged nine and three-quarters, and had to spend two years there, taking the eleven-plus in the second of them. Mrs Mattey seemed quite elderly. Her husband had taught my father at Shooters Hill School nearly thirty years previously. She told us that if she had been able to ‘have her time again’ she would have been a meteorologist. On the day Keith Britter and I left to go to our respective grammar schools – he to the City of London School, me to the Roan - she said, ‘I hope you’ll both become back-room boys.’ She obviously had enormous respect for those scientists who beavered away out of the public gaze, like the weather experts whom she envied. I lost touch with Keith so I never found out whether he went on the science side; he was certainly good at maths. Already a seasoned performer in the local Scout Gang Show, I was clearly not going to be content with hiding in the back room. Mrs M was pint-sized but had a deep and powerful voice that she used to good effect whenever she let fly at any unfortunate.



St Margaret’s Church.

Because we were attached to the parish church we seemed to be forever going over the road for services. My favourites were Harvest Festival - when the place was filled with the rich smell of fresh fruit, vegetables and flowers - and the Christmas Carol service. I sang a solo as one of the three kings, and for two years running I got to read the sixth and final lesson that recounted the visit of the Wise Men.

One of my earliest memories was of singing hymns at Assembly. One of my favourites was 'Jesus bids us shine, with a pure clear light, like a little candle burning in the night. You in your small corner, and me in mine.' But I liked best of all a hymn that just wouldn't be countenanced today: 'Over the sea there are little brown children.' In both cases it was the tune that I loved, as with other, more grown-up hymns like 'Fair waved the golden corn, In Canaan's pleasant land' and 'There is a green hill far away, without a city wall.'

The school was next door to a Territorial Army drill-hall. On rare occasions we were allowed into its cavernous space to watch some performance. My best memory is of seeing Pinocchio there; a magical production laid on by a band of itinerant players. I think we had prize-giving there too; this event usually held in the main playground, as I recall the platform party holding onto their hats, papers held in place on the table by stones, and voices lost in the stiff breeze, no PA system in those days.

I mentioned about my inattentiveness. Because of this the teachers thought I was short sighted and so, not seeing the blackboard clearly, I couldn't take things in and learn them. I had an eye-test at the clinic in Market Street Woolwich, over the road from the Town Hall. I have worn spectacles ever since. They were regulation National Health, round tortoiseshell frames with bendy, curly earpieces. By my mid-teens I had glasses more like my dad's, with more shapely frames and hockey-stick earpieces.

During my last year at St Margaret's I sat the Eleven-plus exam. Consisting of three written papers: English, Arithmetic and 'Intelligence'. Some weeks later you were told whether you had 'passed' for the grammar school or were to go to a Central School, like Bloomfield Road, (where my mum had been a pupil) or to a Secondary Modern, like Plum Lane. Fortunately I made the grade and went to the Roan School in Greenwich. But if your parents had ambitions for you to go to a 'posh' school, as mine did, then you had to take its own customised entrance exam. My dad had long nurtured the hope that I might be good enough for Eltham College, an independent Direct Grant boys' school. I was duly entered for this exam. Mum took Neil Stevens, a classmate, whose parents had the same ambitions as mine, and me by bus to Mottingham to sit the exam. We were there all morning to face a succession of papers not unlike those in the eleven-plus. I recall how big and spread the school seemed, when we were allowed to wander around the buildings during a break. We were instructed to use pencil throughout, so my beautiful Esterbrook fountain pen with its mottled dark red barrel never left my blazer pocket. The upshot of the Eltham College experience was that I had done well enough to be offered a place, but not a *free* place under the Direct Grant scheme. There was no way we were going to be able to afford that, so we all had to be content with the Roan. As it was, I loved my time there and look back on it with tremendous affection.

In my final year at St Margaret's I was picked to be goalkeeper for the school football team. I

don't suppose Mr van Eyck had much choice for his eleven men; we were a small school, a fact that was brought home to us only too well when we lost match after match to much bigger schools in the borough, like the all-conquering Henwick at New Eltham. We practised on Wednesday afternoons on a scrubby bit of the Common near the bandstand. The current school team played eleven other boys, some of whom, a year below in age, could hope to be in the team the following autumn. Our matches were mostly on Saturdays, half of them 'home' fixtures which meant Winn's Common, and the other half 'away', at such venues as Avery Hill Park and Maryon Park in Charlton. We travelled to away fixtures by bus; virtually no one owned a car, and the idea of a school minibus was still a long way off. Our first match was a 2-2 draw against Gallions Mount, and we foolishly thought we could survive in our eight-team league. But no, after that there were just two wins, one further draw and ten defeats; the worst of them being the last game of the season, traditionally played in front of the whole Junior School. I think we went down 4-2. It wasn't just the poor old goalie, it was in fact the whole team that was outclassed, including Alan Manley and Neil Stevens, my two stocky full-backs, and Keith Britter who played centre forward.

St Margaret's C of E School football team of 1955-56.
The names are as follows: Standing L to R: Mr Tom Callard, Brian McCarthy, Victor Crooks, John Stanley, Christopher Martyn, Barry Dormer, Raymond Winchester, John Webster, David Collins, Mr Bernard Van Eyck.
Seated L to R: David Cuffley, James Laden, Brian Semple, Alan Manley, Keith Britter, Neil Stevens, Terry Levett.

I remember with pleasure many other things from my time at St Margaret's. There was the annual London RSPCA story-writing competition. I imagine each participating school was allocated at least one prize for the best entry, and in 1956 I was the lucky one. I had written about Christmas Day with my pet rats, an unusual topic. They were given minuscule

portions of turkey, stuffing, potatoes and Christmas pudding with custard, and scoffed the lot. My prize was a copy of Jack London's *Michael Brother of Jerry,* one of several adventure stories he wrote with a dog as the central character. I still have it.

There were the preparations for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953. We worked for weeks making flags and shields and anything else our teachers could dream up, as long as it was red, white and blue. Some time after her Coronation the Queen spent a week touring the suburbs of London in an open-topped car, expressly for the benefit of the city's schoolchildren. We walked in line half way to Eltham, to a spot on the Shooters Hill Road, opposite the Military Hospital. There we waited patiently while the road was cleared of all traffic and at long last the motorcade came into view. We cheered and thrust our flags high into the air; the Queen and Prince Philip just waved and smiled. And then it was all over and we went back to school. A year or more earlier, we must have been marking the death of George VI, but my only recollection of that was a special service in church during which we sang 'Abide with me, Fast falls the eventide' which was the King's favourite. We hurriedly learned this hymn in Mrs Croucher's music lessons during the previous week.

As a pupil at a church school you not only paid frequent visits to church, but you also grew accustomed to black-suited members of the clergy being about the school, usually the vicar or his curate, but sometimes someone more exalted like an Archdeacon. There was a lot of Bible Study too. I got to know some of the Old Testament stories really well as we heard them that often. My favourites were those about Joseph, his coat of colours and his interpretation of dreams at Pharaohs court.

In those far-flung days we had a third of a pint of milk to drink every day at school. I hated the stuff, cold or warm; it made my gorge rise. So I was 'excused milk' and instead was made milk monitor, puncturing the silver tops with a sawn-off knitting needle, thrusting half-length straws in the holes and placing two bottles on each double desk. Doing this job I couldn't avoid getting milk on my hands; even my clothes seemed to smell of it. To this day I have an aversion to the taste and smell of milk. At home we had milk delivered and in very cold weather you would find the cream standing obscenely out of the neck of the bottle; its silver lid perched comically on top like a hat. Other times the birds pecked ragged holes in the cap.

Fifty years on – to adapt the opening words of the Harrow School Song – I have mixed feelings about my schooling at St Margaret's. I certainly had a good grounding in arithmetic and learnt the value of writing. Thanks to the rigorous training we had for the 11-plus Intelligence Test, I learnt many other skills what are now called 'social skills', some of which were difficult for an only child, like, how to share and 'wait your turn'. Courtesy and deference were stressed, as were sundry other aspects of behaviour, like sitting and standing up straight ('don't slouch! And take your hands out of your pockets!') But I have an uncomfortable sense that while I did OK, if only more effort had been made to discover what some children were good at and how they could excel in their own way. The eleven-plus has few supporters nowadays and I can see why. Mind you, are things any better today, with SATs and performance league tables?

I'm quite content though, with those memories of my school years.

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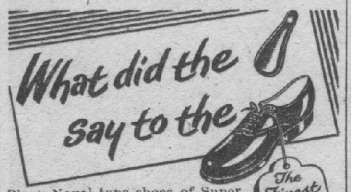

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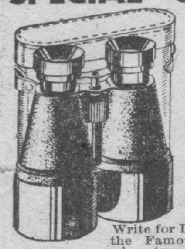

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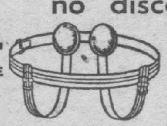

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St Margaret's Church, Plumstead Common

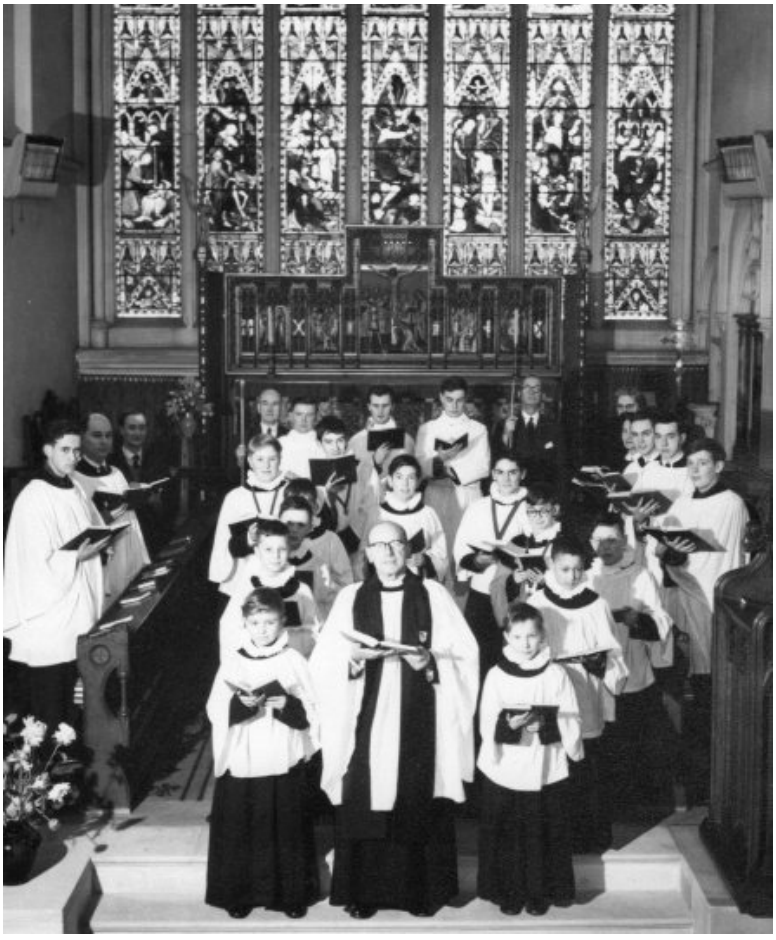
Christopher Martyn

St Margaret's Church – like our house in St John's Terrace – was a part of my life throughout, until I was 21. It was where we were taken from school at several key times in the Christian year, including every Wednesday in Lent. It was where I was baptised at the unusual age of six (one of my parents' funny ideas that unhappily set me apart from my friends) and confirmed at the more normal age of fourteen. I was baptised by the vicar, of course, but Confirmation requires a bishop and in my year it was the brand-new Bishop of Woolwich, Dr J A T Robinson, a former Cambridge don and author of a book which sent waves of disapproval or excitement crashing through the Church of England, depending on whether you wanted your religion cosy or edgy. It was called *Honest to God* and, despite becoming a best-seller, was generally thought to have blocked his chances of advancement in the Church. They said that our confirmation, in 1959, was the first one JAT had done, but I don't know this for a fact. Some distinction, if it was. And St Margaret's was where the banns of my first marriage were read out in 1966, although the wedding itself took place in Hawarden, North Wales.

St Margaret's and the lovely old Vicarage. *Photo: Alan Read.*

St Margaret's was not an ancient building. The old Parish Church of Plumstead is to be found on 'the lower road' or Plumstead High Street, to give it its proper name. It is dedicated to St Nicholas and dates back to the twelfth century. My mother's parents were married there in 1907. The 'new' church was built to cater to the spiritual needs of people who lived in the more recently developed parts of the borough, up the hill on the Common. It had a south door with porch but that was never used, so you went in through the great west doors and were able at once to look straight up the nave to the glorious east window. The baptistery was on your left, its floor covered with small red tiles which, I believe, *were* ancient and brought from somewhere else. At the far end on the left were the organ case and

the door through to choir and priests' vestries. On the right, behind the *decani* choir stalls were the Lady Chapel and organ console. Overhead at the west end was a gallery. This was where the 'Youth Organisations' kept their flags, hung ceremoniously over the lip of the balcony like regimental colours. It was also used when there was an exceptionally large congregation, and every Sunday morning used by the verger or whoever was 'ringing' the bells. Though the church had a handsome, sturdy-looking tower it had no conventional peal of bells, merely a modest carillon on which hymn tunes were played before Sung Eucharist at 11 o'clock and at most weddings. The tubular 'bells' were struck simply by plucking ropes that were held in place by a lofty wooden frame and disappeared through a row of small holes in the ceiling.



St Margaret's church choir.

Along the north side of the churchyard, which was on level ground, ran a long brick wall with a rounded top. This was where new choirboys (probationers) were made to walk as one of a number of initiation rites. The wall was not too high at one end, but because Vicarage Park, which it ran beside, sloped downhill it was perilously high at the other end. Keeping your balance and not stopping was a challenge, but being goaded on by grinning 'seniors' made it all so much worse.

The vicar, from my earliest recollection until I was seventeen, was Canon Reginald Morecambe, BD, AKC. He was a bachelor who lived with his brother in the handsome

Vicarage, formerly Bramblebury House, which pre-dates the church by some sixty years. We had the annual Church Fête and Garden Party there, and the Scouts occasionally used the grounds for outdoor activities that did not require the wide open spaces of the Common. Canon Morecambe was a scholarly man and had gravitas in spades. He retired at the age of 70, so for the time I knew him best he was in his sixties, a little stooped and troubled by arthritis but still fairly spry. In his final year, among other things, he conducted my father's funeral service at Falconwood Crematorium. When he left, the Parish gave him a lot of presents, a token of the very high esteem in which he was held. Many of these were simple, ordinary domestic appliances which he was obviously going to need in his new home in Devon; it was quite distressing to hear him say in his farewell speech that he would have to learn how to use these things because he had never been able to afford them before.

Reggie Morecambe's replacement in 1962 was John Southgate. Here was a man in his forties, full of energy and ideas and with a young family. He was obviously destined for high office, and in fact finished his days as Dean of York, no less. He it was who had to announce to the faithful that the diocese of Southwark wished to merge their parish with that of neighbouring St Mark's, to base the new joint parish there and to demolish St Margaret's church because, built of Kentish ragstone, which weathers poorly, it was too costly to maintain. You could tell that Mr Southgate personally saw no problem with this piece of rationalisation and financial prudence, but he had to manage a succession of tricky meetings with the PCC and the congregation at which every conceivable attempt was made to thwart the decision to pull down their lovely church. They had already, many years before, seen their daughter church of St Alban de-consecrated and turned into a furniture warehouse. The diocesan vandals struck again in the early 70s, saying that St Mark's church too would have to come down, but at least a new one would be built in its place. What is there now is a poor substitute for either of its predecessors, although the architect used some of the glass and fittings from the old buildings. On the site of St Margaret's there is now an undistinguished-looking block of flats. In the wilderness behind it the Friends of Plumstead Common have established a wildlife sanctuary, which is some sort of compensation.

An early print of St Margaret's.

St Margaret's was where my musical education took a huge step forward: at the age of sixteen I was invited to join the Choir as a tenor, and to learn the organ. My five years in the Choir were great. We sang an anthem at Evensong every Sunday, and occasionally put on a special midweek service like Compline with music that Gerald Gostling, Organist and Choirmaster, had chosen. This is where I got my first experience of singing Plainsong and to know such classics of the Anglican choral repertoire as S.S.Wesley's *Blessed be the God and Father*, Ernest Bullock's *Give us the wings of faith*, Vaughan Williams' *O Taste and See* and Morley's *If ye love me.* In Holy Week we sang Schütz's *Passion*; that's when I was given my first tenor solo, taking the part of the Impenitent Thief. As for playing the organ, the idea was that I should be trained up to take the place of Gerald's long-serving deputy, Bruce Wilcock, who was getting married and moving out of his parents' house in Orissa Road to a flat in Blackheath. I loved it, especially staying behind after choir practice and having the whole place to myself. Before leaving I had to turn off the lights and the three-bar electric fire, and lock the outside vestry door. In the pitch dark that could be a tad scary. I was used to taking the Associated Board's exams in piano and musical theory, so to be entered for Grade V in organ seemed the natural thing. Though I passed with Merit, I never progressed beyond that stage. I last played a 'proper' organ over twenty years ago. Do I miss it? I'm really not sure.

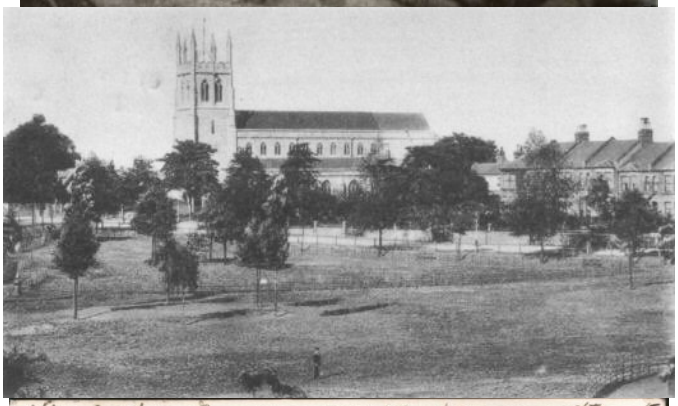
I made good friends in the choir. Among others, there were Alec Anton and John Dodson, basses; Gwen Ayre and Doreen Pearce, contraltos; Michael Paine, bass; Brian Semple and Chris Pennell, tenors (Chris was also a server), and Sid and Phyllis Grout, tenor and contralto respectively. The treble line was sung by the dozen or so boys, of whom, the most memorable has to be Maurice Hawkins. He had a bright red complexion, pop-out eyes and a voice that could cut cloth, but he kept in tune and in time and as Head Chorister was brilliant at keeping the smaller fry in order. Even I was a little afraid of him, I think. Gerald's son, Martin, sang at St Margaret's until he won a place in the choir of the Savoy Chapel in London.

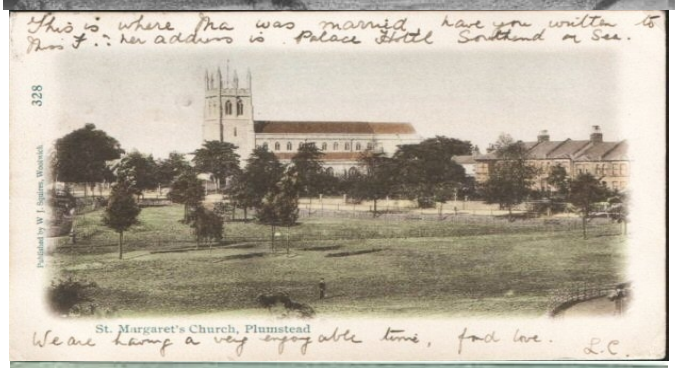
A word about Gerald Arthur Gostling, BA, ARIBA, ARCO. As well as being the Director of Music at St Margaret's he was my piano teacher, organ teacher and the man in charge of the music for the annual Woolwich Scout Gang Show which I took part in for several years. (*see story: The 8th Woolwich (St Margaret's) Scout Group*) A native of East Anglia, he had been Head Chorister at Norwich Cathedral in his early teens, coming to London to live and work in 1940. He was employed initially in the Arsenal but spent most of his working life with the Woolwich Borough Council Architect's Department. He was a wonderful musician who set himself and others the very highest standards. He was greatly respected within the local Scouting fraternity and by musicians far and near. He conducted the Plumstead Choral Society and the Gloriana Choir, and wearing a different hat was Chair of Managers of St Margaret's Primary School. He died in the summer of 2005, aged 89. It was standing-room only at his funeral and the singing threatened to raise the rafters. Gerald was much loved and is sorely missed.

We had a grandstand view of the church from our front-room windows in St John's Terrace. One day a stranger knocked on our door to ask if he could sit on the low wall at the front of the house to sketch the church. We said that would be fine if he didn't mind thrusting his back into the mangy privet hedge that ran behind and sharing it with the caterpillars and

other creepy insects. He must have spent a good half-day on two different pictures before packing up his artist's block and pencils, thanking us and disappearing across the Common towards Heavitree Road. We never saw him again, of course, but I often wondered if he exhibited his sketches locally; they looked pretty good to me.

St Margaret's was a good-looking church, well-proportioned. Its tower became the badge of the primary school. A familiar landmark to the people of the Common for over one hundred years, it featured in any number of picture-postcards that I have seen from those bygone days.





Stories From Welling

on behalf of Peter John Caplin

Safe on the ladder

Originally I come from Welling in Kent. One of the first memories I remember, we lived in Camia Road. Camia Road ran one way, and there were five other roads, all of which ran the other way from ours. During the war, each street running perpendicular to us got a bomb, but they missed our street.

Like a battlefield

I remember going to Wickham Lane during the War. As you went down the Lane, there was a huge cemetery, which had steps going down. It was a really big cemetery. Well, one day, a landmine hit it. And as I walked by I can remember seeing all these skeletons and coffins lying all over the place, because the landmine blew up the whole cemetery.

Suicide by drowning

In Welling Corner, outside the Library, they used to have a huge water tank (in case of emergency). During the war, a lady in her 20s drowned herself and her two children in that tank.

Watching the doodlebugs

My two brothers and I used to go to a place called Abbey Wood. We'd sit there and watch the doodlebugs go over. The sound was terrible. You'd hear them and they'd make this really horrible droning noise, just until the sound cut out. And then there'd be a loud hissing noise.

Keeping the family fed

My old lady was a real Eastender. And during the war, she got a job in a café in Welling. Her name was Rose, so everyone called it Rose's Café — even though it wasn't her café.

Anyway, I used to clean the café, and while I was doing that, she'd be going through the cupboards nicking all the fruit and everything. It was hard to get any of this for us otherwise.

One Sunday, a policeman came in and asked what she was doing. So she told him, and gave him some of what she was nicking out of the cupboard. And he went away, very happy! She never got caught.

Again, when they used to get the fish in, if she fancied it, she'd put her thumb in and break it up, so that we could have some. So there, we were eating fish and chips!

Surviving in a hedge

On a Saturday afternoon, it was about 1944, during the Battle of Britain, the old lady was going up to pay the rent in Bexleyheath. Between Bexleyheath Clock tower and Welling Corner, she was pushing my sister, who was only two years old and me (I was about seven) and my other brother, and a Messerschmitt came down Bexleyheath Broadway and machine-gunned the whole road. And I remember, my old lady threw us into a hedge, so we were okay. But a lot of other people died.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

Surridge Life History Of Brenda May 1924-2005

Michael L Hume

Brenda May Surridge, my cousin, was born on 17th May 1924 at the British Military Hospital, Samuel Street, Woolwich. Her father and mother were Herbert George Surridge, Kate Elizabeth Surridge. Herbert married my aunt, Kate Elizabeth Hume on Christmas day, 1914, four months after the start of the WWI, at All Saints Church in Plumstead. Herbert was 25, Kate was 22. Herbert and Kate were known as Bert and Kitty. Herbert was born in Finchley, Middlesex, 26th Feb. 1889, Kate was born in Portland Place, Plumstead, 18th June 1892. Herbert was a Police Constable.

Brenda aged one year, 1925.

Brenda's grandparent's were Herbert Surridge and Ellen Warner. Herbert was born in 1866 at Pavenham, Bedford, Ellen in 1865 at Brentford, Middlesex. They were married in 1888 in Barnet, Middlesex. Brenda's father Herbert was the eldest of six children. Following his birth in 1889, Violet was born in 1893, Hilda in 1894, Harold in 1895, William in 1898, and Olive in 1900. When Brenda was born, her elder brother Gordon Herbert Surridge was aged nine and her sister Marjorie Constance Surridge was seven. Gordon was born on 18th Oct 1915, at Belsize Rd, Hampstead, Marjorie was also born there on 31st May 1917.

Two years before Brenda's birth, grandfather, John Hume died on 6th April 1922, aged 71. He was buried in Woolwich Cemetery. His body was borne from the family home of 101 Barnfield Road, Plumstead, to his grave, on a Royal Artillery Gun Carriage as a mark of respect for his long service in the Regiment of the Royal Artillery. He was buried in the same grave of his daughter Margaret who had sadly died on 9th Feb the previous year. Margaret was 34. Brenda's uncle, Frank Hume, 22, married Marie Violet Kemp, 20, just before Brenda was born on 19th Jan 1924. In May 1924, the Surridge family had moved back to Plumstead, from Hampstead, and lived at 76 Princes Road, close to where Kate was born, and the Hume family home. Herbert's occupation was Canteen Steward, still with the Metropolitan Police. It is thought Herbert suffered with a stomach ulcer and was medically unfit to carry out the duties of a Police Constable, and transferred to the Police canteen.

The General Strike took place in 1926, when Brenda was just two years old. Most working class families were seriously affected by the strike, but as Herbert was in the Police force, their regular family weekly wage was still coming in.

On 4th Jan 1927, Kate's eldest brother William Thomas Hume, 38, married Edith Agnes Sherbourne at Woolwich Register Office. Both their second marriage.

Brenda's earliest memory was of my dad, John Robert Hume, placing her on his shoulders, whilst wearing his full Grenadier Guards dress uniform, and burying her head in his Busby, she was probably aged three or four.

On 2nd May, 1930, Kate's brother, my father, John Robert Hume was demobbed from the Grenadier Guards, after a seven year engagement. Later, on 3rd Nov, John married my

mother Kate Parslow, at Woolwich Register Office. My father was 32, mother was 25. They lived with grandmother Mary Hume at 101 Barnfield Road. Mother was called 'Queenie', as her mother was also called Kate. My mother's family lived in Bristol, but my mother was working at 228 Blackfriars Road, London, in service, when they got married.

On the 26th January 1931, my brother John Robert Hume (named after my dad) was born at 101 Barnfield Road and was baptised on 1st March at All Saints Church, Herbert Road; it is likely all the Hume family attended the Christening service. Brenda was almost seven, there probably was a family get together afterwards.

On 14th Nov 1932, my sister Mary Agnes Isabel Hume was born at the British Hospital, Samuel Street. My family lived with grandmother at 101 Barnfield Road.

Brenda's mother Kate sadly died on 21st March 1933, aged 40. The death certificate identifies she died of Pulmonary Tuberculosis at their home at 4 Brookhill Row, Herbert Road. Herbert was present at her death. Herbert had changed jobs at that time and was recorded on the certificate as a Butchers Outfitter's Packer. Kate was buried at Woolwich Cemetery, in an unmarked grave. Brenda was almost nine years old.

Prior to Kate's death, possibly 1931, Marjorie and Brenda had gone to live with their aunt Agnes, at 76 Flaxton Road, Plumstead. Aunt Agnes was unmarried and shared the house with a friend Miss Miskin, a teacher at a local infant's school. It appeared aunt Agnes did the housekeeping. Being religious they attended The People's Hall The Slade, close to their house. Brenda was about seven and Marjorie was 14. Gordon, almost 16, worked at J Thorn & Co. Long Lane, Bexleyheath, lived with grandmother at 101 Barnfield Road. Gordon was studying for an accountancy degree.

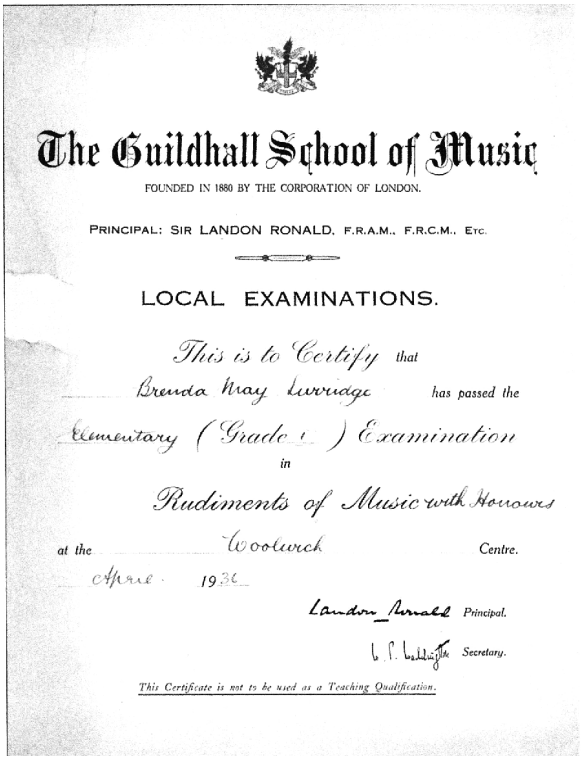
It would seem that Brenda's father, Herbert Surridge, decided that he was either unable or unwilling to keep the family together after his wife Kate died, and agreed to the arrangement with his daughter's living with aunt Agnes and Miss Miskin. There may have been a problem with trying to hold a job down and looking after his family at the same time, combined with financial and medical problems.

Brenda in 1936 aged 12.

After leaving school, circa 1933, Marjorie worked as a clerical assistant at the Woolwich Equitable Building Society, Woolwich. David my brother, was born on 11th Nov 1934 at the British Military Hospital; the family address was now, 4 Brookhill Row, Herbert Road, Plumstead; the same house that Brenda's family were living in prior to Kate's death, so it would appear that after Kate died, my family took over the tenancy in Brookhill Row. David was baptised on 13th Jan.1935 at All Saints Parish Church, Herbert Road.

Brenda attended Bloomfield Road, Primary School in 1935. Good academically, she entered a competition and won an award certificate for writing a 'Safety First' essay. Gifted musically she attended the Woolwich Centre of the Guildhall School of Music, and was awarded certificates with Honours, in April and Dec 1937 for passing examinations in the Rudiments of Music and Pianoforte playing. Brenda was awarded a Pupils Certificate with Honours, Junior Division, in December 1937 from the

Trinity College of Music, for the following: Notation, Time, Intervals, and Terms.



The Guildhall School of Music

FOUNDED IN 1880 BY THE CORPORATION OF LONDON.

PRINCIPAL: SIR LANDON RONALD, F.R.A.M., F.R.C.M., ETC.

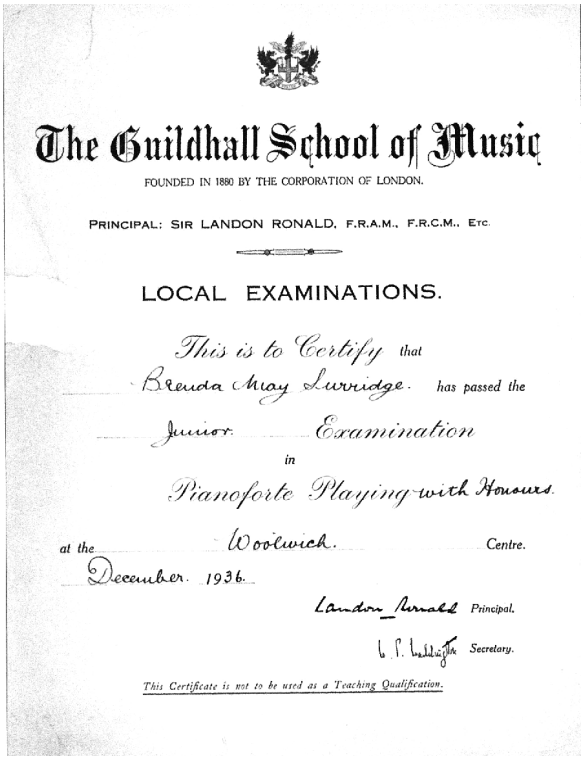
LOCAL EXAMINATIONS.

This is to Certify that Brenda May Lurridge has passed the Elementary (Grade I) Examination in Rudiments of Music with Honours at the Woolwich Centre. April 1936

Landon Ronald Principal.

Secretary.

This Certificate is not to be used as a Teaching Qualification.



The Guildhall School of Music

FOUNDED IN 1880 BY THE CORPORATION OF LONDON.

PRINCIPAL: SIR LANDON RONALD, F.R.A.M., F.R.C.M., ETC.

LOCAL EXAMINATIONS.

This is to Certify that Brenda May Lurridge has passed the Junior Examination in Pianoforte Playing with Honours at the Woolwich Centre. December 1936

Landon Ronald Principal.

Secretary.

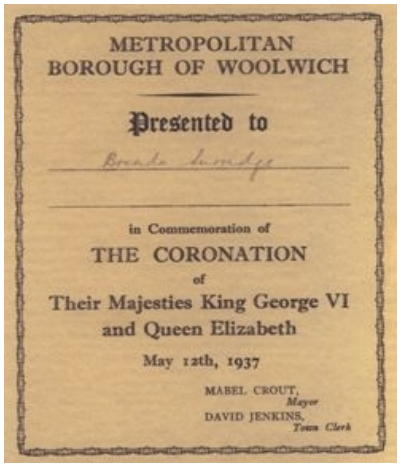
This Certificate is not to be used as a Teaching Qualification.

Musical certificates with honours awarded to Brenda in 1936 for various examinations.

Although Brenda was now living at 76 Flaxton Road, Saturday mornings she would walk to 101 Barnfield Road to visit our grandmother. She recalled sitting with her in the back room of the small terraced house, in front of the black fire range, while grandmother would tell her stories about the Irish little people, the Leprechauns, as they looked into the burning embers of the fire. Grandmother would always have one of the old stone bottles of ginger beer sitting in the hearth, together with a jar of mustard pickles. On occasions, grandmother would smoke a clay pipe. Brenda would stay for a couple of hours and then walk back to Flaxton Road. Brenda also remembered that the house had a long narrow garden, with a long path, an aspidistra was in the window of the small front room. Brenda attended Sunday School at The People's Hall and was an active member of the Girls Life Brigade. One of her good friends was Audrey Clarke. 101 Barnfield Road was situated on the left hand side of the road at the top, approaching it from Plumstead Common Road, and Brenda remembered that the neighbours were very kind people. Not far from the house was a council yard where the steamrollers were kept, and Brenda was fascinated by the noise and smell of these vehicles.

In 1936, Brenda attended King's Warren Grammar School for Girls situated by Plumstead Common.

My brother Geoffrey Allan Hume was born on 20th March, 1937, at the British Military Hospital, and was baptised at All Saints Parish Church on 2nd May. Also on 2nd May, a son, Malcolm Hume, was born to Frank and Marie Hume at home at 64 Barnfield Road. Frank's occupation was 'Central Market Butcher'. Malcolm was baptised on 30th May at All Saints Parish Church.


METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH OF WOOLWICH

Presented to

Brenda Surridge

in Commemoration of
THE CORONATION
of
Their Majesties King George VI
and Queen Elizabeth
May 12th, 1937

MABEL CROUT,
Mayor
DAVID JENKINS,
Town Clerk

Brenda's Coronation Certificate, May 12th 1937.

On December 11th 1936, King Edward V111 abdicated the throne and the next day King George V1 ascended the throne. On the 12th May, 1937 the Coronation of King George V1 and Queen Elizabeth took place. All school children in the Metropolitan Borough of Woolwich were presented with a suitably inscribed book to commemorate this occasion; we have Brenda's copy.

On 6th June 1939, I was born at the British Hospital and on 2nd July, my sister Mary and I were Christened at All Saints Parish Church, Herbert Road. Mary was aged seven.

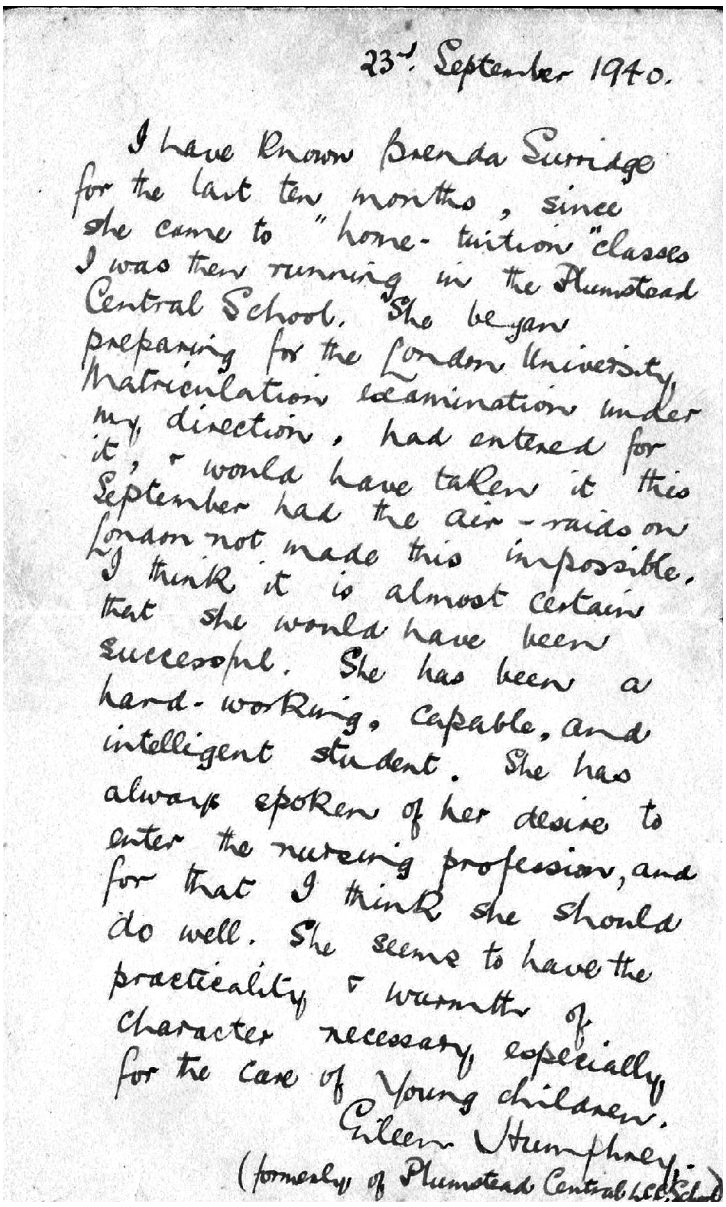
On the 3rd September 1939, England declared war on Germany.

At the outbreak of war in 1939, Brenda was evacuated to live with a family in Maidstone, Kent. She was aged 15 at that time. She was very unhappy with this move and only stayed there for a month before she returned home to Flaxton Road. Audrey's mum and dad brought her home.

Brenda's brother Gordon married Eileen Nora Kennedy, on 16th December 1939. Gordon was 25 and Eileen was 22. They married at St Michael and All Angels Parish Church, Plumstead. Their addresses were 11 and 12 Congress Road. Gordon's occupation was a Clerk, his father Herbert, a Boot Repairer. Sadly it appears that no members of the Hume family, other than Marjorie and Brenda attended Gordon's wedding; neither did Gordon's father. Marjorie and Brenda stood outside the church but were not allowed inside to see the ceremony, and were also not allowed to attend the wedding reception, held at Eileen's parents' house. Aunt Aggie and aunt Mitt were fanatically religious and any form of religion that did not comply with their strict Baptist beliefs was totally out of bounds to Marjorie and Brenda. This was especially upsetting to Brenda who worshipped her brother Gordon. Eileen and her family appear to have been treated rather badly by the Hume family, although Eileen and grandmother Mary were close. Unfortunately, Gordon's friend who took the wedding photographs, had problems with his camera, so the only picture they had of Gordon and Eileen was taken about a week later in the garden of their house, when Eileen put her wedding dress back on and they posed for the picture.

In 1940 Gordon Surridge enlisted in the RAF Volunteer Reserve, aged 25.

Sometime in 1939/1940, grandmother's house, 101 Barnfield Road, suffered serious bomb damage. The 1938/39 Electoral List shows that grandmother, auntie Isabella, Gordon Surridge, and auntie Annie Louisa (auntie Ciss), were living there at that time. Following the house sustaining the damage, grandmother went to live with aunt Agnes and miss Miskin at 76 Flaxton Road.



23rd September 1940.

I have known Brenda Surridge for the last ten months, since she came to "home-tuition" classes I was then running in the Plumstead Central School. She began preparing for the London University Matriculation examination under my direction, had entered for it, & would have taken it this September had the air-raids on London not made this impossible. I think it is almost certain that she would have been successful. She has been a hard-working, capable, and intelligent student. She has always spoken of her desire to enter the nursing profession, and for that I think she should do well. She seems to have the practicality & warmth of character necessary, especially for the case of young children.

Eileen Humphrey
(formerly of Plumstead Central LCC School)

Copy of reference letter from Brenda's tutor Eileen Humphrey, 23rd Sept 1940.

The war and the bombing raids seriously disrupted schooling, and in early 1940 Brenda attended 'Home Tuition Classes', that were organised from the LCC Plumstead Central School. Brenda was preparing for the London University Matriculation examinations. She was due to sit the examinations in September 1940, but the air raids on London made this impossible, however her Tutor Eileen Humphrey, wrote a reference for Brenda on the 23rd September 1940, explaining the situation, and stated that had she taken the exams she would undoubtedly have passed. The reference also outlines that Brenda had always expressed a desire to enter the nursing profession, and that her tutor felt that she would ideally be suited to undertake a nursing career, and had the right kind of qualities.

Brenda aged 17 holding a young child at the children's nursery where she worked in Slough, Bucks from Sept 1940 until June 1941.

On the 24th September 1940, The minister of The People's Hall, Rev. Russell–Jones, wrote an open reference for Brenda, for a specific position, probably as a child helper at a children's nursery run by the Bucks County Education Committee in Slough. Brenda stayed in lodgings while she worked at the nursery, from September 1940 until June 1941. In July another reference was written by Walker Heddle, The Peoples Hall,

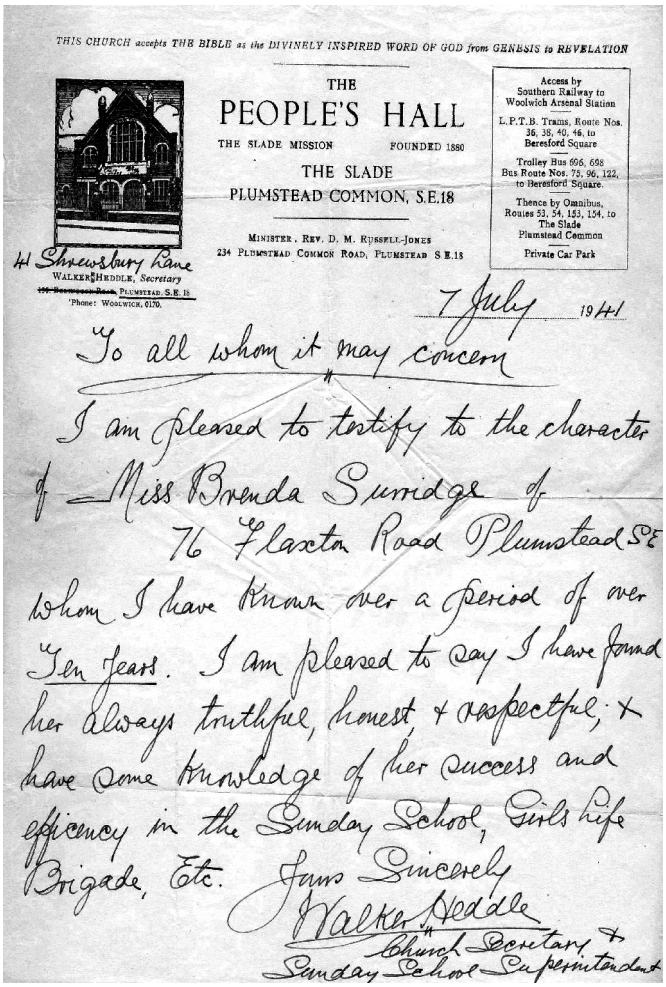
secretary, and Sunday School superintendent, recommending her to a future employer, to enable Brenda to be accepted into a nursing training position.

In Aug 1941, Brenda commenced her nurse training at Oldchurch County Hospital, Romford in Essex, aged 17.

On 23rd March 1942, aunt Agnes married widower Arthur Henry Wood at 'The Peoples Hall'. Aunt Agnes was 59, and Mr Wood 60, Brenda and Marjorie moved from 76 Flaxton Road and went to live with Mr & Mrs Wood at 67 Vernham Road. Brenda was away training travelling back odd weekends and on leave.

On 27th April 1942, Gordon Herbert Surridge died after being shot down and fatally injured on a bombing mission over Rostock, Germany, the previous day. He was a Sgt Gunner/ navigator, and his plane, a Stirling Mk 1, was attacked by a Messerschmitt 110. He died of his wounds in Tondor Hospital, Rends, Denmark. He was buried in the Allied Military Plot, Aabenraa Cemetery, Denmark. He was 26.

On 6th June 1944, the D-day landings took place.



THIS CHURCH accepts THE BIBLE as the DIVINELY INSPIRED WORD OF GOD from GENESIS to REVELATION

THE
PEOPLE'S HALL
THE SLADE MISSION FOUNDED 1880
THE SLADE
PLUMSTEAD COMMON, S.E.18

MINISTER, REV. D. M. RUSSELL-JONES
234 PLUMSTEAD COMMON ROAD, PLUMSTEAD S.E.18

Access by
Southern Railway to Woolwich Arsenal Station
L.P.T.B. Trams, Route Nos. 35, 36, 40, 46, to Beresford Square
Trolley Bus 666, 698
Bus Route Nos. 75, 96, 122, to Beresford Square.
Thence by Omnibus, Routes 53, 54, 153, 154, to The Slade Plumstead Common
Private Car Park

41 Shrewsbury Lane
WALKER HEDDLE, Secretary
[illegible] PLUMSTEAD, S.E. 18
'Phone: WOOLWICH, 0170.

7 July 1941

To all whom it may concern

I am pleased to testify to the character of Miss Brenda Surridge of 76 Flaxton Road Plumstead SE whom I have known over a period of over Ten years. I am pleased to say I have found her always truthful, honest & respectful; & have some knowledge of her success and efficiency in the Sunday School, Girls Life Brigade, Etc. Yours Sincerely

Walker Heddle
Church Secretary &
Sunday School Superintendent

Reference letter written for Brenda by Rev. Russell-Jones of the People's Hall the Slade in 1940.

On 16th July 1944 Mary, Geoffrey and I were evacuated to Ugborough in Devon after the enemy bombing became intense. This was the last wave of evacuation for children from London under a Governmental programme called 'Rivulet'. The Germans were targeting Woolwich Arsenal and the 'Buzz bombs' V1's (Flying bombs) and V2 rockets made the whole of SE London a very dangerous place to live. John Robert remained at home to complete his education, as he had just won a technical scholarship.

Aunt Aggie and uncle Wood wedding Peoples Hall, The Slade, 23rd March 1942. This was aunt Aggie's 59th birthday.

On 12th August 1944, Brenda's father, Herbert Surridge aged 54, married my aunt, Isabella Hume aged 50, at the Woolwich Register Office. Herbert was an Asst. Storekeeper, Motor Works, and Kate a Coil Winder at Seimans in Plumstead.

A terrible family tragedy.

Brenda's father, Herbert George Surridge. dated 1943.

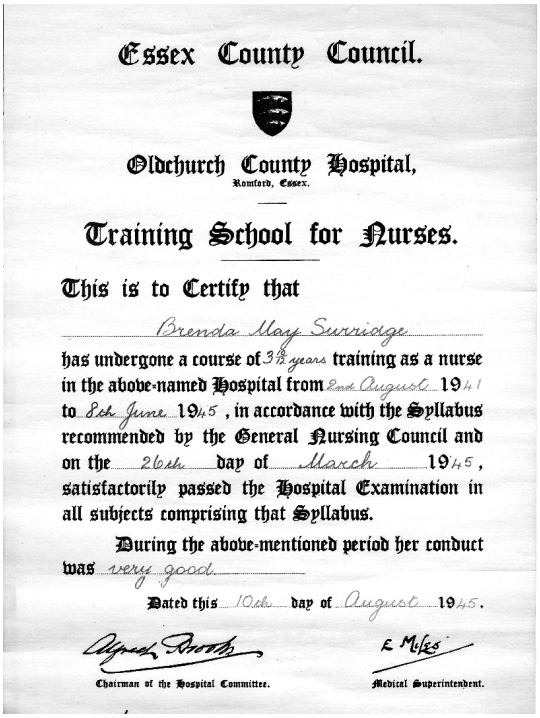
On Wednesday 1st November 1944, at 2.30 am, our family home at 140 Eglinton Road, took a direct hit from a V2 rocket. My father, mother, grandmother, brother John Robert, and my aunt Isabella were all killed.

The awful news was told to Mary, Geoffrey and me on Saturday November. 4th, by William George Beare, Headmaster of Ugborough Primary School that we attended while evacuated in Devon, Mary was aged twelve, Geoffrey seven and I was five .

On 7th May 1945 there was an unconditional surrender by Germany.

In May 1945, both Geoffrey and I returned to London to live with aunt Agnes and uncle Wood. On 17th May Brenda celebrated her 21st birthday, with a party at 67 Vernham Road. Plumstead.

On 7th June 1945, Brenda was admitted to the General Nursing Council Register as a Registered State Nurse, having completed her nursing training at Oldchurch County Hospital, Romford, Essex. Brenda continued working at the Oldchurch County Hospital, and began specialised midwifery training passing her first examination set by the Central Midwives Board on 3rd June 1946, and the second exam on 23rd December 1946. In Feb 1948 Marjorie commenced training as a Teacher, at Oakley College at Cheltenham Ladies Teacher Training College, having previously worked for the Woolwich



Essex County Council.

Oldchurch County Hospital,
Romford, Essex.

Training School for Nurses.

This is to Certify that

Brenda May Surridge

has undergone a course of 3½ years training as a nurse in the above-named Hospital from 2nd August 1941 to 8th June 1945, in accordance with the Syllabus recommended by the General Nursing Council and on the 26th day of March 1945, satisfactorily passed the Hospital Examination in all subjects comprising that Syllabus.

During the above-mentioned period her conduct was very good.

Dated this 10th day of August 1945.

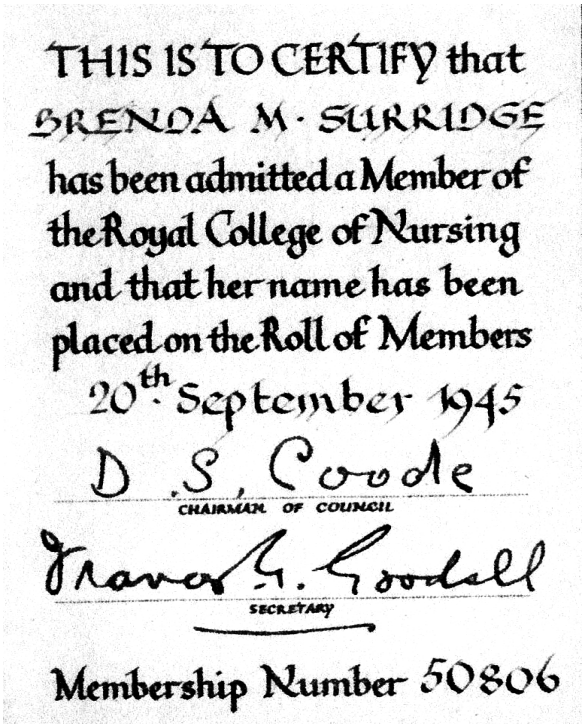
Alfred Brooks
Chairman of the Hospital Committee.

E. Myles
Medical Superintendent.

Document confirming completion of Brenda's nursing training at Oldchurch Hospital from Aug 1941 to June 1945.

Equitable Building Society. In June 1948, Brenda commenced at Causeway Lane, Maternity Hospital, Leicester. Positions attained were Night Sister and Ward Sister.

On April 5th 1950, Eileen Nora Surridge nee Kennedy, married her second husband Herbert Archer Scott at St Michael and All Angels Parish Church in Plumstead. Eileen was 32 and Herbert 34. Their addresses at that time were listed as 11 Congress St and 61 Bostall Lane, Abbey Wood.


THIS IS TO CERTIFY that
BRENDA M. SURRIDGE
has been admitted a Member of
the Royal College of Nursing
and that her name has been
placed on the Roll of Members
20th September 1945
D. S. Coode
CHAIRMAN OF COUNCIL
Trevor G. Goodall
SECRETARY
Membership Number 50806

Brenda's membership to the Royal College of Nursing 20th Sept 1945.

In Nov 1950, Brenda attended a Midwife Teacher Training College at High Coombe, Kingston Hill, Surrey for a six month residential course, which she completed in May 1951.

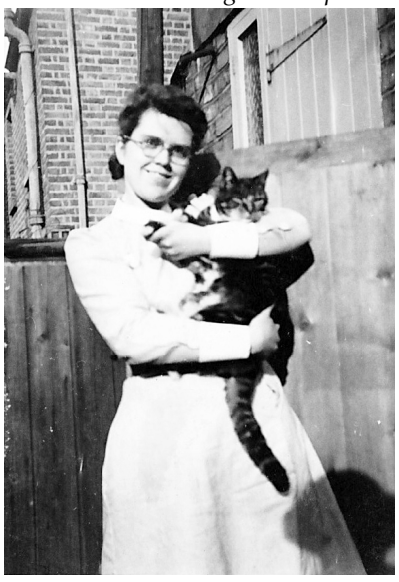
Aunt Agnes died on 16th February 1951 aged 67, at 67 Vernham Road, Plumstead. Uncle Wood was present at the death.

In September 1951 having passed my 11+ examinations. I commenced school at St Olave's and St Saviour's Grammar School at Bermondsey aged twelve.

In Dec 1951, Brenda passed the Midwives Teacher's Diploma examination, set by the National Midwives Board.

On 6th February 1952 King George V1 died.

In May 1952 Mr Wood put Geoffrey and me into the care of the London County Council. Geoffrey worked in London as a Commis Chef, living in digs, and I was sent to live with a Mr & Mrs Nash, at 33 Burney Street, Greenwich. Geoffrey was 15 and I was nearly 13 years old.



Brenda, aged 18, holding Tiger.

On 15th August 1952 auntie Ciss married Andrew Faldon at The Register Office, Dartford, Kent. Andrew was 56 and Auntie Ciss was 55.

Towards the end of August 1952, Mr A Wood now retired and aged 70, at 67 Vernham Road, Plumstead, sold the family home, and bought the bungalow at 133 Pickford Lane, Bexleyheath. This was now the new home for Marjorie and Brenda, who lived with him and kept house for him. Marjorie was 35, Brenda 28. On 1st September 1953, their father, Herbert George Surridge died at his home, 215 Long Lane, Finchley. He was 64.

On 5th March 1960 Michael Hume 20, married Carol Christine Finch 16 at St Barnabas Church, Dulwich. Marjorie and uncle Wood attended the

wedding.

In 1961 Geoffrey Allan Hume, 24, married Yvonne Curtis at Westminster Registry Office.

On 1st January 1962 Andrew Faldon died aged 65, at home "The Elms, Lesney Park, Erith, Kent. He was cremated at Eltham Crematorium.

On 27th September 1963, Mary Agnes Isabel Hume aged 30, married Rupert Horace William Pleece, 52, at The Register Office, Worthing.

On 11th August 1963 Arthur Henry Wood died at Queen Mary's Hospital Sidcup. He was 81, and Brenda notified his death, as Marjorie was on holiday at that time. In his will, uncle left the bungalow at 133 Pickford Lane, Bexleyheath, and his personal chattels to his two nieces, Marjorie and Brenda in equal shares. The properties that he owned in Eltham, he left to a number of charities.

Michael & Chris wedding on March 5th. 1960. L-R. Uncle Wood, Marjorie, bridesmaid Chris, best man Bob Reid, Michael & Chris, bridesmaid Jill, and Chris's mum.

Left: Wedding of Geoffrey Hume and Yvonne Curtis in June 1961.

On 9th January 1964, uncle Frank aged 60, died at his home, 44 Ridgeway Road, Sidcup, Kent.

In 1964, Brenda accepted the position as Deputy Sister Tutor at the Redhill County Hospital, where she befriended Audrey Dodd, who had been working at the hospital since 1946. They remained friends right up until Brenda died. Brenda shared a flat at Redhill with Chris Hudson. The position of Head Sister became vacant and Brenda applied for the position but not successful, and resigned toward the end of 1964. Whilst at Redhill, Brenda also made a good

friend of Anne Geraghty, and they kept in regular touch.

After Audrey married Bill Dodd, Brenda met up with them every year and they went on holidays together. Bill was a Vicar and Bill and Audrey were located at Vicarages in Herefordshire, Abergavenny, and Aberdeen, before finally settling in Lugwardine in Hereford in 1983.

Mary Hume with David when he was Christened in 1967.

In 1968 Brenda secured a senior Administrative position with the Lewisham Health District as senior Divisional Nursing Officer at Lewisham University Hospital, which she held for eleven years before retiring in 1979 at 55, after spending 38 years in the nursing profession.

Brenda and Marjorie in 1979. Brenda had just retired from her job as Senior Divisional Nursing Officer at Lewisham District Council. Marjorie had retired from her position as Headmistress of a local Primary School.

On 17th January 1970, Geoffrey Allan Hume, 32, married Linda Elizabeth Wyatt, 20, at Hitchin Register Office. This was the second marriage for both of them. Linda's maiden surname was Allen.

On 18th October 1970 Mary Agnes Isabel Hume died, aged nearly 38, at the Mount Alvernia Nursing home in Guildford, Surrey. Her son David who was then aged three came to live with us at Luton.

On 5th January 1978, Aunt Mary Ellen died in the Bromley Hospital, Bromley in Kent. She was aged 88. She had been living at the Robert Whyte House, Oldfield Road, Bickley, Kent..

On 10th February 1979, Annie Louise Faldon, (aunt Ciss), died aged 81, at a care home in Bromley. Sydney House, Hawkwood Lane, Chislehurst, Kent.

In 1979 Brenda retired as Senior Divisional Nursing Officer, Lewisham district Council after an eleven years, and to commemorate and recognise her 38 year nursing career, she was invited to a tea party at Buckingham Palace.

On 18th April 1986, Marjorie Constance Surridge died aged 68. She died in the Ambulance on the way to Brook Hospital, Greenwich. In Marjorie's Will, she left her share of the Bungalow at 133 Pickford Lane to Brenda.

In June 1987, Chris and I made contact with Brenda, not having seen her for some 35 years. She recognised me after all that time, and made us most welcome. She gave me some very precious documents, which had been kept in the safe; these consisted of my father's army documents, and some of my family's birth and death certificates.

In November 1991 aunt Marie Hume died aged 87, widow of Frank Hume.

Our daughter Lesley, Brenda & Chris at our home in Wardown Cres. Luton, during a visit by Brenda in 1988. Lesley was expecting our first granddaughter Katie.

I retired from Dowding and Mills, as a Company Director in June 2002. In August while Brenda was on a cruise with her close friends Rachel and Di, Chris and I stayed at 133 Pickford Lane. In late 2004, following a visit to Chris's cousin in Toronto, Canada, Chris and I decided that the time was right to start tracing our family history.. At every stage of tracing the family, we kept Brenda informed. Initially she seemed almost disinterested, but as we began to piece together all the family history, she became more and more interested, and provided some priceless information, although we believe that she had wiped out quite a few of the unpleasant memories from her childhood. I produced some complex family trees..

Following a publication in a local paper in Dec 2004, about trying to trace my cousin John Hume, we received an invaluable lead that led us to find his children, although sadly John had died just three weeks earlier. As a result of that publication, Brenda contacted our cousin Malcolm Hume and we managed to find out even more background information on the Hume family, and obtained a picture of my dad. Searching for the 'Parslow's', my mother's family, led us to their family who originated from Bristol. In a breakthrough, we found my auntie Amy, my mother's youngest sister, born in 1928, 25 years after my mother Kate was born in 1905. We visited auntie Amy in May 2005. It was a very emotional meeting and she gave us a picture of my mother with my brother John Robert sitting on her lap. The picture was dated 21st December 1931.

In October 2005, Chris and I travelled to Thomastown, in County Kilkenny, Southern Ireland, and visited Pleberstown, where my great grandparents lived and where my grandmother was born and christened. We managed to obtain a copy of my grandmother's christening certificate, and also visited the church of St John in Kilkenny where my grandparents were married on 8th February 1881. On our return we compiled all the information and gave it to Brenda. She was so interested, as she was unaware of the history of our grandparents, although she knew that grandmother Mary was born in Ireland.

Chris and I visited Brenda on Saturday 17th December 2005, just before Christmas. At Brenda's request, I visited a few local residential care homes, to get some idea of waiting lists, financial costs etc. as Brenda was resigned to selling the bungalow and going into a home. She had decided that she was only able to manage with the help of Di looking after her and was not looking forward to loosing her independence and leaving the bungalow, which had been her base home for the past 54 years.

Brenda during a visit to us in Aug 2000 holding our cat 'Tina' in our back garden.

Brenda was extremely fond of cats. During Brenda's lifetime she had had many cats, I remember when I first went to live at 67 Vernham Road, at the age of six years, the pet cat 'Tiger' a very friendly tabby. Her last cat 'Ebby', who she had rescued from a cats home, became very poorly. He had diabetes, and Brenda used to inject him daily; it's ironic that Brenda also suffered from diabetes. When 'Ebby' got worse Brenda had him put to sleep,. Looking after 'Ebby' was one of the main reasons for her to face each day, and since that day in October, Brenda's health had also deteriorated.

On Wednesday 21st December 2005, we were notified that Brenda had died in the Lewisham University Hospital, at 11.06 pm while undergoing an emergency operation. She was 81. She had been taken ill earlier in the day and was suffering intensive pain in her tummy. Her very good friend Di, who had stayed with Brenda while her health had been deteriorating, called the ambulance and she was taken to Woolwich Hospital and later transferred to Lewisham University Hospital for an emergency operation. At her request, Brenda was cremated at Eltham Crematorium, following her funeral service at St John's Baptist Church, Erith, on Friday, 6th Jan 2006. Her ashes were buried in the grave of her mother Kate Elizabeth, in Woolwich Cemetery, on 27th Feb. 2006, and a headstone was erected to both Brenda and her mother on Thursday 25th May, 2006.

June 2006.

Sweet Rations And Hospital

Tony White

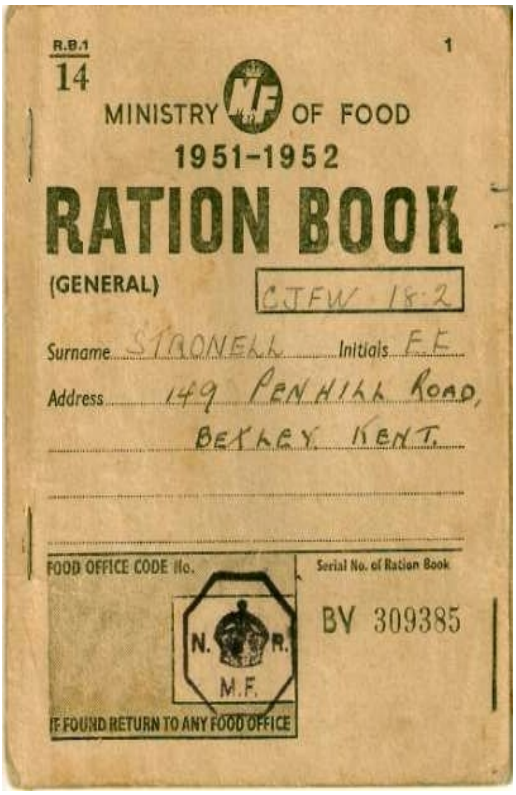
As was not uncommon, children needed to go to hospital to have various bits and pieces removed or added or for illnesses to be over-come. My father had been admitted for the common tonsils and adenoids op. St Alphages (?) Woolwich.

Having had the ubiquitous Admission bath, although freshly scrubbed at home in the tin bath in front of the fire, he was admitted to the ward where he was processed.

Knowing that he was going into hospital, his mother had saved his sweet ration for him and put them into a tin for him to dip into when he got the need.

In order for them not to 'go astray' a staff nurse kindly took the tin for safe keeping but, to ensure it was nothing untoward, took a peek inside. The amount of the three or four weeks of the rationed sweets enlarged the eyes so much she almost dropped the tin. And then, turning to my father, told him that he couldn't keep them as there were other children in the ward and promptly dispatched the lot into a ward 'comfort' tin. For the benefit of the patients or the staff, he knew not, but is miffed to this day about the sweets he never got!

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'


R.B.1
14

1

MINISTRY OF FOOD
1951–1952

RATION BOOK

(GENERAL)

CJFW 18·2

Surname STRONELL Initials F.E.

Address 149 PENHILL ROAD,
BEXLEY. KENT.

FOOD OFFICE CODE No.

Serial No. of Ration Book
BV 309385

N. R.
M.F.

IF FOUND RETURN TO ANY FOOD OFFICE

Ration Book. *Photo: Miriam Bastable.*

Symms Family History

Karen Francis a great niece to ACH Symms

Charles Symms was born in Schull, Co Cork, Ireland in 1834. County Cork was one of the worst affected areas of Ireland during the potato famine in the 1840's. This is thought to explain his decision to relocate to England along with his brother William. Both of them first appear in the 1851 England Census, both recorded as bricklayer's labourers, and they are lodging with a MacCarthy family at 4 Arthur Street, Plumstead. Their surname is incorrectly spelled as Simms.

Charles worked at the Woolwich Arsenal and I have his death certificate, which states suicide by swallowing Oxalic Acid, a substance I believe was used extensively at the Arsenal.

Alexander also worked at the Woolwich Arsenal and over time lived at many different addresses in the Woolwich district. I also have two swimming certificates for his daughter, my grandmother, one of which states Timbercroft School as her current school. My grandmother was the only survivor of Alexander's immediate family. He lost two daughters and a son in infancy, he also lost his wife when she was 32, leaving him with a son and my grandmother. The son then enlisted in the RAMC and was killed at Paschendaele a month or so before his 18th birthday. Shortly afterwards Alexander died, a combination of alcohol and something referred to by my grandmother as 'red lung' (I have not been able to track down his death certificate to confirm this). So, at the age of 16 and with all her immediate family gone my grandmother moved to Birmingham to be with her maternal grandparents.

Gertrude Kate Symms (Right, my Grandma) Alexander Charles Henry and Frank, circa 1903. Photographer was J McConnell, 47 Bramblebury Road, Plumstead.

I do have a lot of documents on him too, including his Post Office Savings book with his King's shilling deposited. I also have the death certificate for Alexander's wife.

On 19th July 1852 Charles married Margaret Leary, also from Ireland, at the Episcopal Chapel in the parish of Bexley, Kent.

Charles and Margaret had ten children:

Thomas George Symms b.1854.

John Symms b. 1859.

Elizabeth Symms b. 1861.

Charles Symms b. 1864.

Jane Symms b.1866.

Rebecca Symms b. 1869.

Alexander Symms b. 1871.

Fanny Symms b 1873.

Ellen Symms b. 1876.

Margaret Symms b. 1879.

Charles Symms (Snr.) died on 8th February 1887, at 78 Pattison Road, Plumstead, at the age of 53. On his death certificate, the following information was recorded:

Occupation: Labourer in metal foundry, Royal Arsenal.

Cause of Death:

Suicide by swallowing Oxalic Acid. Temporary mental derangement (from Post Mortem.)

Signature, description and residence of informant: Certificate received from E Arundel Carlton, Coroner for Kent. Inquest held 10th February 1887.

Charles' youngest son, Alexander, remained in the Woolwich area for the rest of his life. On 25th December 1897, he married Florence Kate Burr at St Peter & St Pauls, the parish church of Aston, Birmingham. Although he met Florence in London her family had relocated to Birmingham when her father accepted a job with Dunlop, having been an employee of the India Rubber Company in Silvertown, London.

Alexander and Florence had 5 children in all:

Margaret Annie Symms b 29/9/1898 d 16/3/1900 (Broncholpneumonia/Syncope).

Alexander Charles Henry Symms b 15/10/1899 d 5/10/1917 (Killed in Action by shellfire, Paschendaele Ridge).

Frank Symms b 21/1/1901 d 27/2/1903 (Tubercular Meningitis Hydrocephalus, Kings College Hospital).

Gertrude Kate Symms. 14/9/1902 d 17/2/1987.

Dorothy Rose Symms b 27/8/1903 d 1/1/1905 (Broncholpneumonia/Syncope).

Florence Kate Symms died on 30/3/1905 with a perforated ulcer of duodenum and acute peritonitis aged 32.

Alexander was married in 1897 and by 1905 had lost 3 children and his wife leaving him with Alexander Charles Henry and Gertrude Kate.

In 1914, Alexander Charles Henry (ACH Symms) enlisted for the Royal Army Medical Corps having deposited his King's Shilling into his new Post Office savings account. His father received news that on 5th October 1917 ACH was killed in action while acting as stretcher bearer for wounded men on the front line. ACH was awarded the following medals:

1914/5 Star; 1914/8 British War Medal; 1914/9 British Victory Medal.

A commemorative plaque and scroll were also given. All of these items, plus his birth certificate, letter from his commanding officer, letter from his army chaplain, photo in uniform, 1911 School Attendance medal and his Post Office savings book were donated to the RAMC museum, Aldershot in 1999.

Alexander was recorded in various records as living at the following addresses:

23 Armstrong Place, Plumstead (1871 census).

21 Station Road, Plumstead (1881 census).

78 Pattison Road, Plumstead (1887, Charles Symms' death certificate).

78 Pattison Road, Plumstead (1891 census).

46 Thorngrove Road, Upton Park, Plaistow (1900, Margaret Annie's death certificate).

47 Bannockburn Road, Plumstead (1901 census).

20 Walmer Road, Plumstead (1902, letter to Alexander from Florence Kate).

1 Station Terrace, High Street, Plumstead (1905, Florence Kate's death certificate).

15 Woodview Terrace, Plumstead (1911 census).

43 Walmer Road, Plumstead (1914, ACH Symms' Post Office Book).

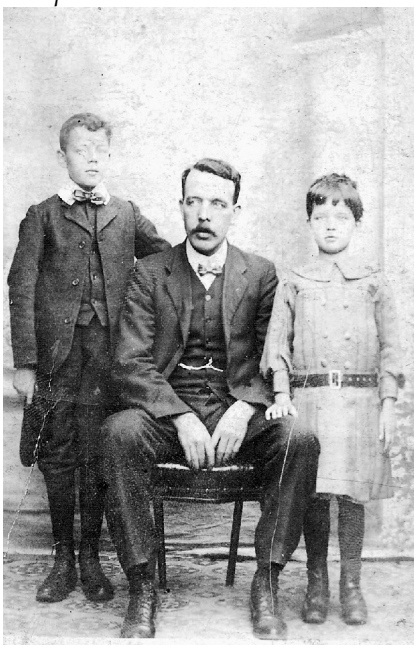
20 Molesworth Street, Lewisham (Letter informing of ACH Symms' death).

The news of ACH's death took its toll on his father Alexander who, already suffering lung problems derived from his work at the Royal Arsenal, took to drink and died in 1918 leaving Gertrude Kate alone at age 16.

At this point, Gertrude Kate relocated to Erdington, Birmingham to live with her maternal grandparents, Annie and Henry Burr. Gertrude Kate married Ambrose Francis at St Peter & St Paul, parish church of Aston, Birmingham on 5th November 1927, the same church her parents were married in. They had 2 children of their own but also fostered many children over the years which complimented Gertrude's work at Cottage Homes in Erdington. Ambrose died in 1957, Gertrude Kate died 17th February 1987 due to the effects of diabetes.

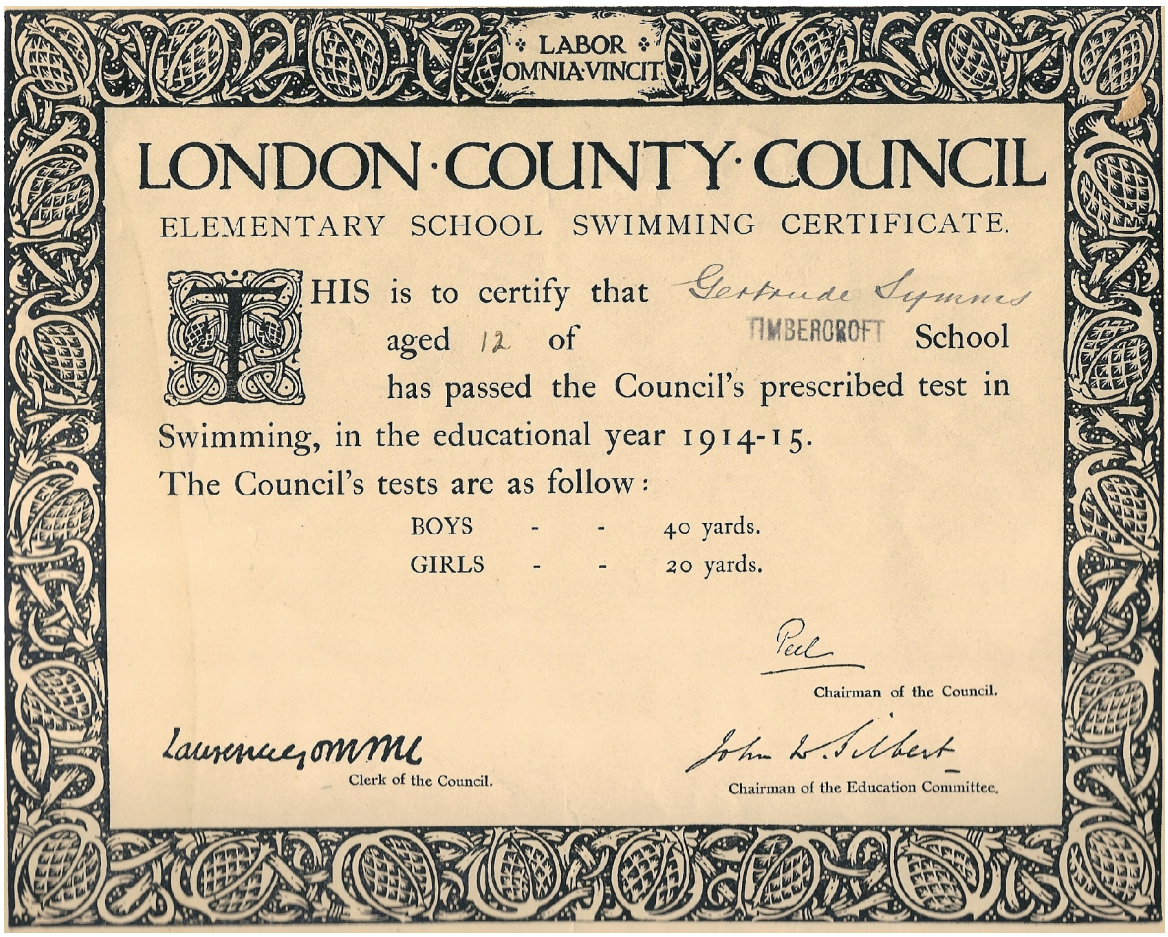
Two swimming certificates exist for Gertrude Kate for the academic years 1914-1915 and 1915–1916. The 1914–1915 certificate states that Gertrude Kate was a student of Timbercroft school. She was 12 years old and had to swim 20 yards to obtain the certificate from London County Council. The 1916 certificate was issued by the N&E Lewisham branch of the London Schools Swimming Association and was a certificate of 1st class.

Rifle Club in Plumstead, probably taken at the turn of the century, one of the people depicted is believed to be my great grandfather, Alexander Symms.
It has the initials PRCRC, which I think now is Plumstead Roman Catholic Rifle Club. Alexander was Catholic but his wife and children were not, hence his marriage in Aston Parish Church.
Alexander is standing 2nd from the left in the photo. I guess this was taken after 1901 but before 1916 as I have a wedding photo taken in 1916 with Alexander as guest and the effects of his illnesses are very obvious in the later photo.



Left:
The Symms family: Alexander Symms (Seated), Alexander Charles Henry Symms (Left), Gertrude Kate Symms (Right, my Grandma). I believe this photo was taken when Grandma was approx 7 years of age, around 1909.

Florence Kate Burr engagement 1895.



LABOR OMNIA VINCIT

LONDON·COUNTY·COUNCIL

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SWIMMING CERTIFICATE.

THIS is to certify that Gertrude Symms aged 12 of TIMBERCROFT School has passed the Council's prescribed test in Swimming, in the educational year 1914-15.

The Council's tests are as follow:

BOYS - - 40 yards.
GIRLS - - 20 yards.

Peel
Chairman of the Council.

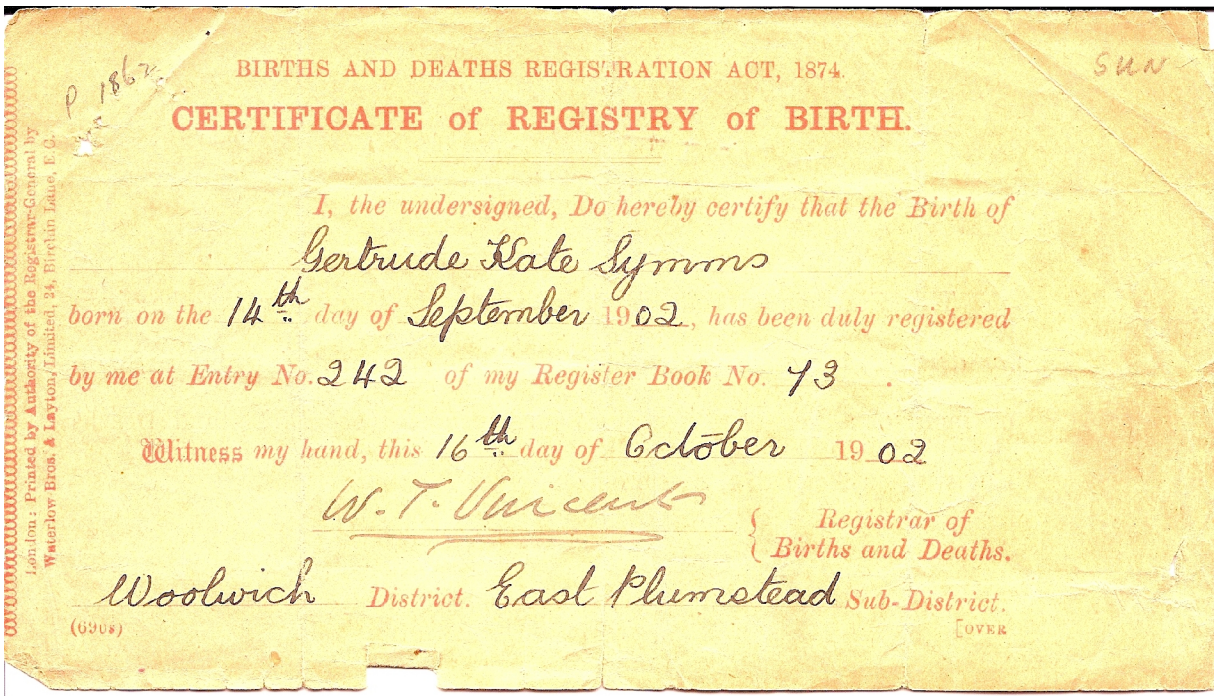
Lawrence Gomme
Clerk of the Council.

John W. Gilbert
Chairman of the Education Committee.

Gertrude Symms Swimming Certificates, above, Timbercroft School 1914-15 age 12 and below,London Schools SA, 1st class, 1916.

LONDON·SCHOOLS SWIMMING·ASSOCIATION

N. & E. Lewisham BRANCH
CERTIFICATE·OF·THE 1ST CLASS
GRANTED·TO·
Gertrude Symms
·THIS 26th DAY·OF Sept. 1916
G.H. Neal HON: SEC:



BIRTHS AND DEATHS REGISTRATION ACT, 1874.

SUN

P 1862

CERTIFICATE of REGISTRY of BIRTH.

I, the undersigned, Do hereby certify that the Birth of

Gertrude Kate Symms

born on the 14th day of September 1902, has been duly registered

by me at Entry No. 242 of my Register Book No. 43.

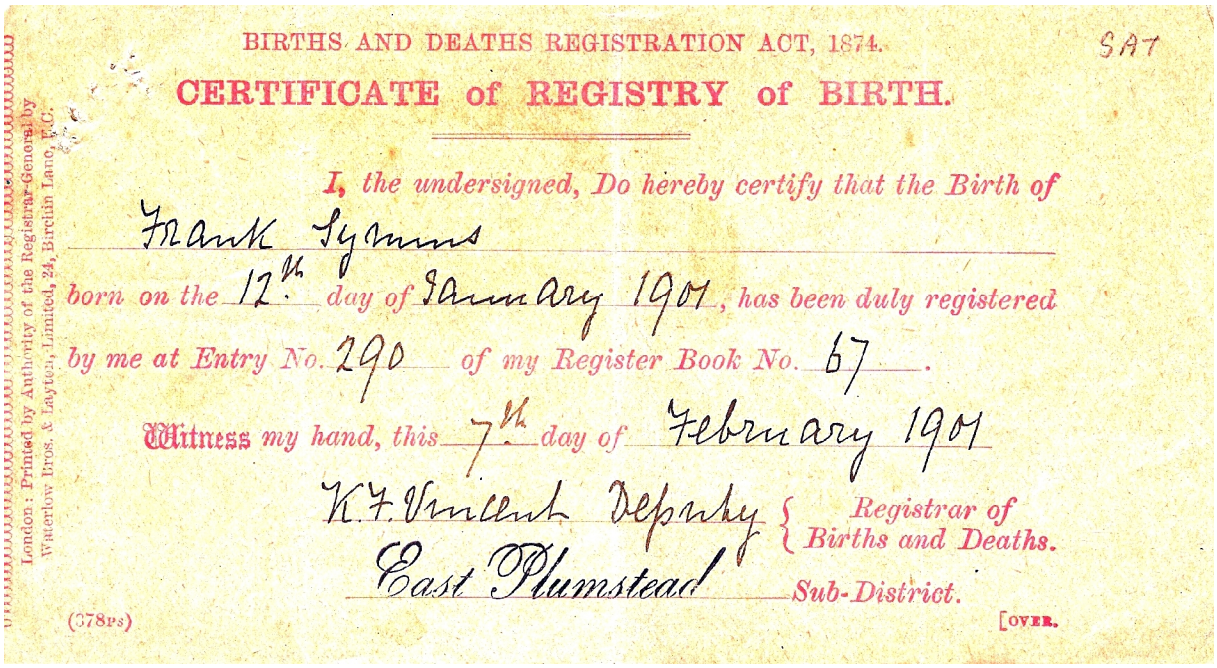
Witness my hand, this 16th day of October 1902

W. T. Vincent { Registrar of Births and Deaths.

Woolwich District. East Plumstead Sub-District.

(6908) [OVER

London: Printed by Authority of the Registrar-General by Waterlow Bros. & Layton, Limited, 24, Birchin Lane, E.C.



BIRTHS AND DEATHS REGISTRATION ACT, 1874.

SAT

CERTIFICATE of REGISTRY of BIRTH.

I, the undersigned, Do hereby certify that the Birth of

Frank Symms

born on the 12th day of January 1901, has been duly registered

by me at Entry No. 290 of my Register Book No. 67.

Witness my hand, this 7th day of February 1901

K. T. Vincent Deputy { Registrar of Births and Deaths.

East Plumstead Sub-District.

(378ps) [OVER.

London: Printed by Authority of the Registrar-General by Waterlow Bros. & Layton, Limited, 24, Birchin Lane, E.C.

Top: Gertrude Symms Birth Certificate, 16th October 1902.
Bottom: Frank Symms Birth Certificate, 7th February 1901.

Ted Atkinson Remembers

Beasley Brewery worker

Beasley Brewery gate entrance, Lakedale Road,c.1960's.
Photo: Richard Dixey.

I attended Earl Rise School then, later on, Plum Lane School. At 70 years old, I have no clear recollection of either except for the Headmistress and one teacher, Miss Cuff, at Earl Rise and Mr Gillam, Mr Hancock and Mr Gabe at Plum Lane.

With four firm friends, I went out from the school at dinner times and explored the park at the top end of Plum Lane (Shrewsbury Park) and the wooded areas by Shooters Hill; we often passed the huge tower at the summit of Shooter's Hill, this was when I attended Plum Lane School. The towers original use was as a shot tower, the slit openings were the levels for the type of shot required, for light shot, the molten lead was dropped into water from the

top level and the heavy from the lower level; the fact that the tower contained a deep pool could be how it might have been seen as a water tower, but you would not want to drink that particular water. Shot towers were mainly square in shape, so this one is quite ornamental by comparison. The other shot tower, that stood where the Queen's Hall now stands, on the south bank of the Thames, was demolished in 1949; it was a square type structure.

There was a notice beside the tower at the time, which described its historical purpose in the manufacture of lead shot for shot gun and musket ammunition, even then in 1952, it was believed to be the only remaining shot tower in existence in England. As kids, our little gang of boys roamed the wooded parts that existed at that time and we passed it on almost a daily basis. The Headmaster of Plum Lane, up to the time I left in 1954, was Mr Gillam, Mr Gabe was the science teacher till 1953, when he was attacked by a boy with the surname Loft. My teacher was Mr Hancock, who's main subject was maths. I left at the age of fifteen to work in Beasley's Brewery, in Lakedale Road. At first, in the bottling section as a stacker, then in the bottling plant, in maintenance; though as with most jobs in the brewery, you still had to do both jobs. The brewery was, I believe, the last to use horse drawn drays to deliver to local public houses. I loved to watch those huge shire horses in their paddock.

A Beasley Brewery delivery dray drawn by two beautiful large Shires down Lakedale Road past head's the greengrocers. (on the right of photo)

I attended two of the schools as I said; Earl Rise infants and primary then on to Plum Lane Secondary School. My sister and I were evacuated during the war to Dawlish, in Devon. Our introduction to Dawlish was to arrive there at the height of a fierce storm; the rail station runs almost on the beach and we had to wait between wave surges to run into the station buildings, as the waves were breaking onto the train. Also, we learnt that the day before we arrived, a lone German fighter had machine gunned the street we were to live in, but he only managed to put lots of holes in the corrugated fence that bounded the allotments at the top of the road; the only defence there was a single AA gun which was fixed pointing out to sea. At Dawlish, because my sister and I were too young for fostering, so to speak, we were housed at JB Priestlies residence till we were five years old. I then came back to London at the end of the war from my evacuation.

At the end of the war, we found that we had at least one brother, as we met him on the bus during the journey home, when we were comparing our labels! We found later that we were part of a family of eight. My eldest two brothers and sister came home from the war, another brother served in the merchant navy, though my sister and I would not have remembered anything of our home; we learned that our house, which had been the oil shop in Raglan Road had been fire bombed, the details are not clear, but I was told that the incendiary bomb had rolled off the roof and into an empty paraffin tank, no one was home at the time; mum was working at an armaments factory in the Arsenal and dad worked at the Woolwich power station, on the coal dock, Our new home was in Griffin Road where it crosses Brewery Road.

In the garden there, dad found a stone bottle, in our case, it contained an excellent red wine, age unknown, but the area was part of Griffin Manor, which stood at the top of the hill and close to the Common, and was hit several times by fire bombs and explosives. The bottle was found when dad had dug down in a raised area of the garden; there was a void and some broken stone, but he could not proceed further because we would have been undercutting next doors yard. It was the only bottle he found which was a shame.

Before the family moved to Plumstead, they lived with the Romany group of gypsies, south of the railway line at Erith; you have to be specific, because if you say you lived with the gypsies north of the line this was the Boswell's and south of the line was the Lee's; we were accepted because dad did the carving on the vardoes.

Most of my school life was as it should be; a relatively happy time, though I did have a large amount of my hair pulled out in the primary school when one of the boys went mad; (literally) he never left the mental institution. I never really got all my hair growth back, though now at 70 it does not matter. At Plum Lane, during a music lesson, another boy suddenly started to howl like a wolf; I never did know what became of him, though he was just taken away to hospital.

Leaving school at 15, I started work at the local brewery in Lakedale Road, first providing empty bottles for the girls on the Cyclops bottle washing machine, then on to the stacking rooms at the other end of the bottling plant. I worked on all stations of the plant and, after a while, I also did cleaning and maintenance on the various machines. There were two rows of identical machines, though I only ever saw them run one at a time; the second row only

being used if there was a breakdown. The only dangerous part of the operation was as the bottles exited the pasteuriser; the pressurised bottles cooled so the pressure in them rose, so if they fell or were handled wrongly, they had the tendency to explode. There was a thick plastic screen across the end of the machine which went some way to guard the person guiding the bottles onto the conveyor, but the girls filling the crates had no such guard, so they took great care handing the bottles. The pints and half pint bottles were fairly safe, but with the thinner quart bottles you had to be extremely careful.

The beer arrived at the bottling plant from large pressure vessels (which I also got to clean) in the first and highest buildings to the left side of the Lakedale Road entrance. The building were laid out around a large yard and the bottled beer was processed on the left hand buildings. The stacking and transport banks were at the far end of the yard, roughly off centre at the top end were the offices and medical room and down the right hand side was the drought barrelled beer section.

In a section of the brewery there was a large granite tank that contained the yeast *goop. We were given a dose of this by the company nurse twice a week, and they did give it to passers by, when requested by them, at the old gate house, from a stone bowl, if you ever remember the taste, it was something you might or might not have fond memories of.

(*From a story in vol. 1 of Common Folk, in Colin Weightman's story, Errands & Shop Memories, Colin recalls,"Another errand that I was occasionally sent on, was when any of us kids got a boil. Dad would then send me on my way with a jug down to the Beasley's Brewery to get a jug of yeast. I would get this frothy liquid by entering the brewery and then into the yeast settling troughs situated in a big room where the yeast was held in large concrete troughs. The brewery worker would dip the jug into the frothy mix and fill the jug with it. Dad reckoned it was the best cure for boils and such like ailments. On the way home, I'd secretly swig a drop of the bitter dark brown liquid that seeped from the frothy yeast which collected in the bottom of the jug. Dad would give us kids a few big desert spoonfuls of this liquid and froth." (See also, in the same volume the story: Beasley's Brewery...An Ale Tale by Roger Jewiss.)*

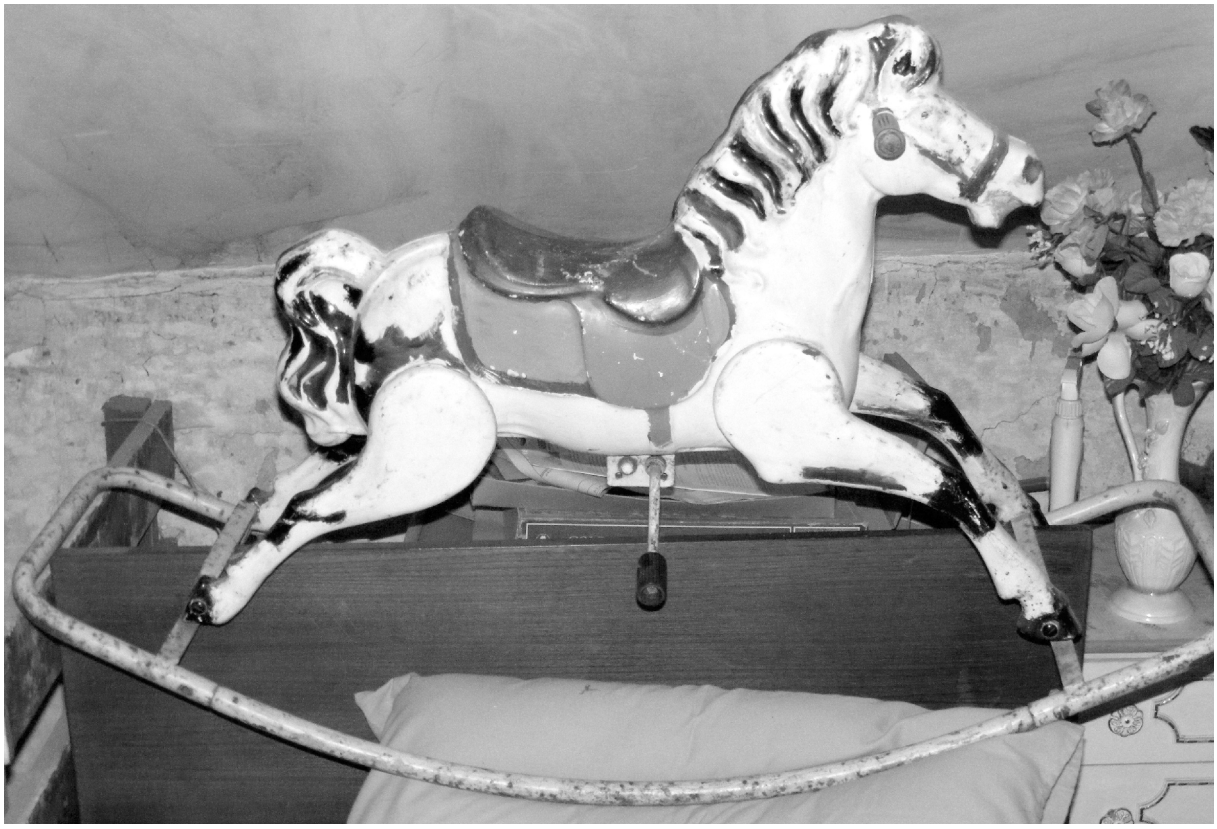
Next to the drought section, on the left hand side, was the paddock where the big Shire horses were stabled; there was a back entrance via what is now Willowfields Close, the wall, which can still be seen that bounds Orrisa, Brewery and Conway Roads. The brewery yard site, now demolished and is now a small housing estate.

On leaving the Brewery, I took a job in the London docks working for the Port Line shipping company (the cargo part of the Cunard line) as a ships rigger, this also included cleaning the holds ready for the next cargo, then rigging the lifting gear required for the many different varieties of cargo to be shipped. I then went from this to National Service, though it only involved completing the two weeks training, as prior to the training a car accident left me unfit for service with the army.

On my release from the Army, I returned to the docks, but this was only to be short term as the last of the big dock strikes left me and many hundreds of others without work.

I then got a job at Matchless Motor Cycles, the company also built Norton, Francis Barnet and AJS bikes. Many enthusiasts were not aware that Norton motorbikes were in fact made at the the Matchless plant. Another product that would be a surprise to Motorcycle fans, was

the metal rocking horse, that was popular in those days, was made at the Matchless factory. A power press was used which, gave a better defined shape to the horses body than the one manufactured at Mobo, so because of this it was contracted to Matchless. Two types were sold, one with spring support, the other on the more normal rockers.



The rarer Mobo Rocking horse (Not with the original Dappled grey colouring, this one had been hand painted and is awaiting restoration in storage).

My job with Matchless initially, involved parts washing (paraffin pressure washer), then I went on to gearbox assembly, then tyre fitting and finally engine testing on the various models, including the racers, as ridden by Mike Hailwood and others. The bikes were stored on the roof of the factory. The racers were road tested on normal roads around Plumstead (I don't think this would be allowed today). One of the managers on the gearbox floor designed the first five speed box for motorbikes, he was Vic, but his last name escapes me.

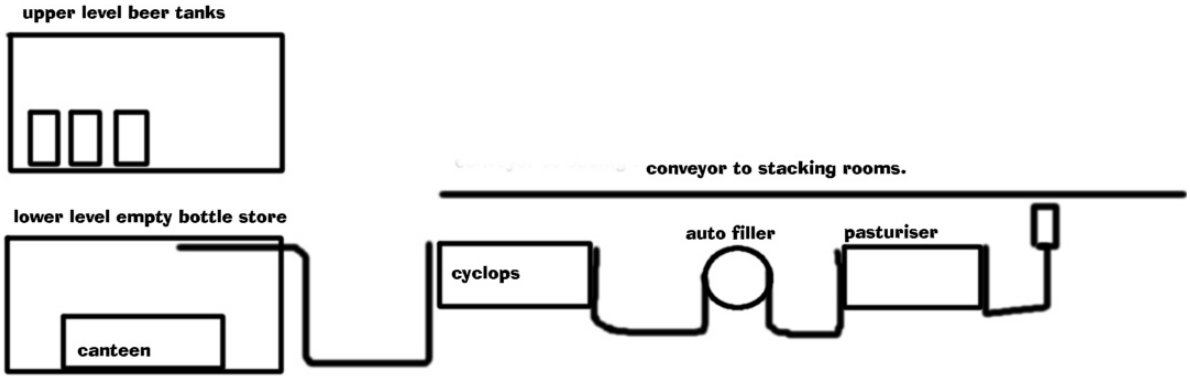
I stayed with the company until they decided they would move out of London and go to Kings Lynn, in Norfolk; this decision caused many of their essential staff to leave; the company closed down soon after.

Chapman's the bakers at the bottom of Griffin Road was still running as a bakers into the 1960s; our family bought our bread from there. The Lord Derby was the pub on the opposite side of Griffin Road and was a Beasley's house; it and the Green Man (a free house, half way to Lakedale Road) were dad's favoured watering holes, he never used the Rose and Crown, (can't remember who's beer they served, but I think it may have been Watney's). Some shops opened in Brewery Road, Lambert's General store and almost opposite them a butchers; there was also a Co-Op further along that road near to the school.

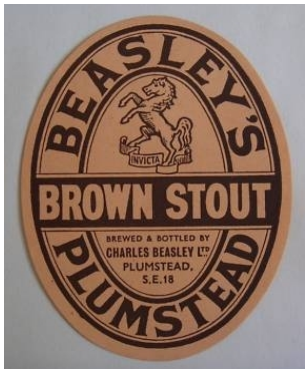
How times change; the ladies beer was called 'milk stout', a milder form of Guinness, though it was Beasley's own brand, political correctness would not allow it to be called 'milk stout', and the strong ale OBJ, was just that. Stella would not hold a candle to it for strength, but it tasted best right out of the bottling machine.

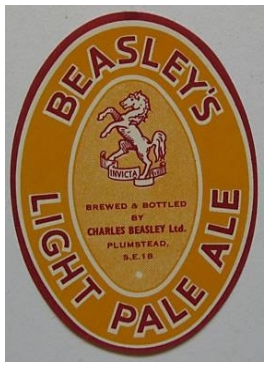
I can still remember the brewery layout and have added a simple block diagram.

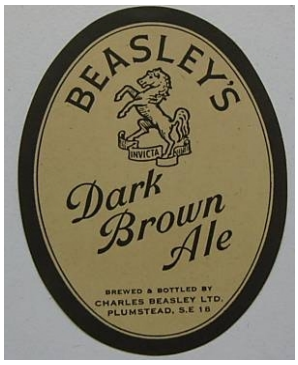
*Goop! A substance that was smooth and creamy, but foul tasting to me, e.g. an acquired taste. My reference to it only.

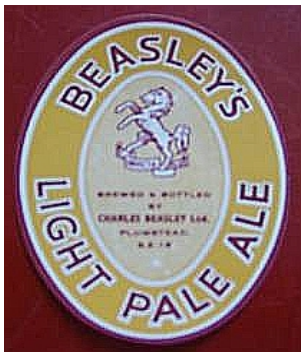


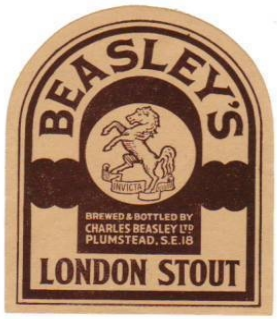
A block layout plan of the Beasley Brewery. Drawn by Ted Atkinson who worked there.



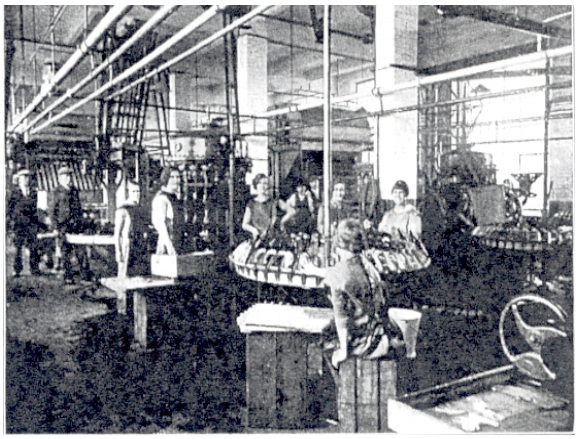






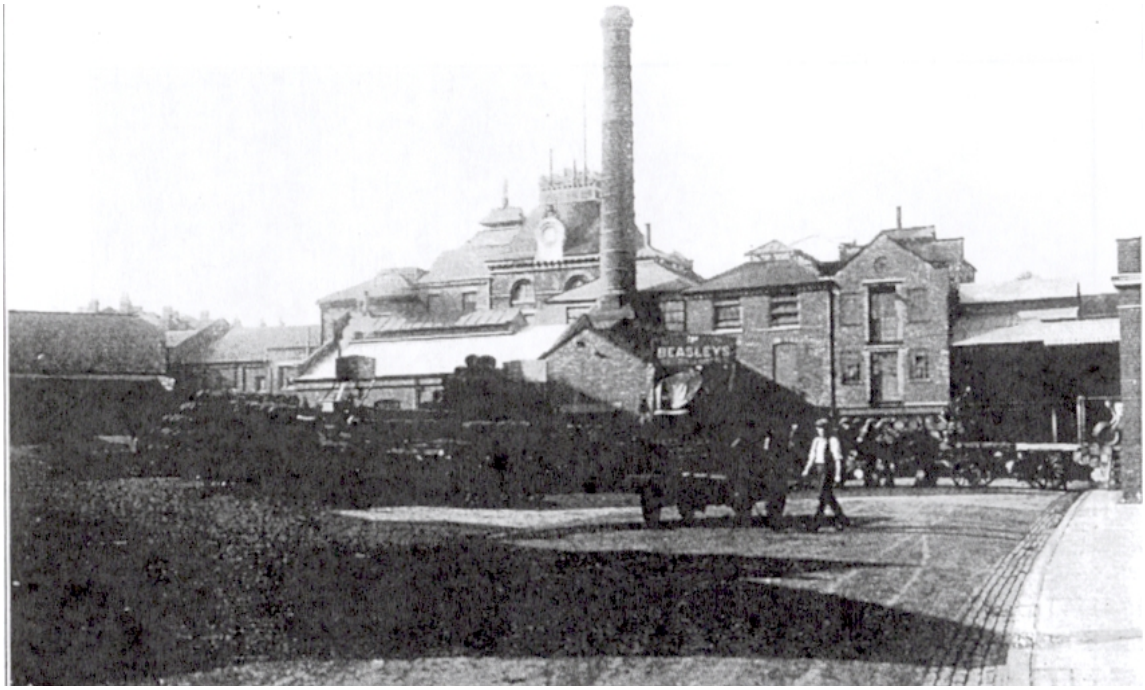


Beasley three horse dray in the earlier days.

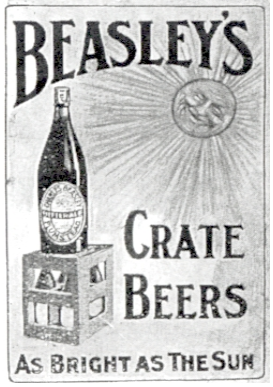


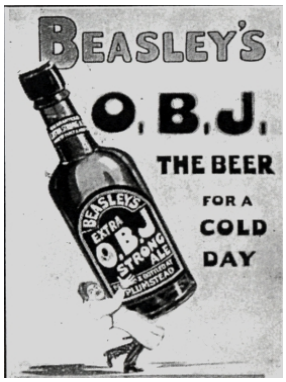
The above building was the Bottling Stores. The Bottling plant, above left, you can see by the large windows that this was originally in the main building, but was moved further along the yard to a single story building; the two lines in this picture are both running; the large machines in the background were the pasteurizing plants. This building took up the left hand side of the main yard; the upper floor with blacked out windows, was where the wort was processed; the third floor contained the beer tanks. Through the window at the right hand end of the second layer, you can see the door to the canteen; at ground level was the bottle store; this was altered later, to become the bonded store for spirits, but part was set

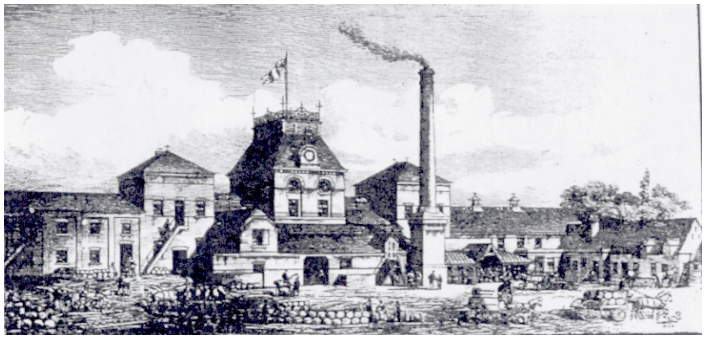
aside for a maintenance shop. The bottle store moved to the top end of the yard. The white door became the entrance to the maintenance workshop; the steps at the far left, led to the bottling plant room.



The Main Brewery Yard. On the left are barrels waiting to be repaired and cleaned before being filled with beer. On the far left, you can see the bottle loading bank, behind this were the relocated bottle stores; centre is the draft beer plant and far right the barrel loading bay.







Some early adverts for Beasley's beers.
An early sketch of the brewery when owned by Messrs
Mitchell & Beasley. North Kent Brewery.
All photos Greenwich Heritage Centre and Ted Atkinson.

The 8th Woolwich (St Margaret's) Scout Group

Christopher Martyn

You could join the Cubs at the age of eight, but I wasn't enrolled until I was nine-plus. The reason? I am not sure, but I suspect that my parents, and in particular my mother, were not very keen, discouraging even, for reasons which I shall spell out later. But my friends were in the Cubs, and I so envied them having a uniform to wear on the afternoon of Empire Day in May, when we paraded behind Union Jacks around the school playground. I used to ask them what all their different insignia meant, but like members of some arcane society, sworn not to divulge its secrets to outsiders, they told me little or nothing. Eventually, though, I prevailed upon the sceptical parents to let me join.

It felt good to be on the inside. I enjoyed the weekly Cub nights, with their games and working towards those proficiency badges that I so much coveted. You had a card pre-printed with a list of skills to be mastered, beside each of which was a space for the date when you 'passed' that particular test and the Cub mistress's signature. There were things like tying knots (manual dexterity), walking with a block of wood on your head (posture), using a compass (orientation) and accurately reciting all three verses of the National Anthem (patriotism?). After the Tenderfoot - which I am sure today would be called 'entry level' - you went on to two further stages; successfully completed, each of them entitled you to wear a metal star on your green peaked cap. The Cub Pack was divided into 'sixes', each with its leader and deputy, the Sixer and his Second. I made it to the dizzy heights of Sixer and proudly wore two yellow hoops round the sleeve of my navy blue jersey to prove it. Some of our Pack had proficiency badges all the way up their arms, it seemed; there was nothing they couldn't turn their talents or their interests to. But since the majority of the skills could only be picked up if you were the hearty outdoor type, I was not going to do very well. Catch me going in for the Backwoodsman or First Aid badges! I acquired just two: Collector and Artist. There were 'wide games' on Plumstead Common and in Shrewsbury Park, during the light summer months, and songs round the fake (i.e. electric) camp-fire in the colder, darker times of the year. There was the annual Soap Box Derby in the grounds of Goldie Leigh Hospital on Bostall Hill. I was only ever a spectator, but it was thrilling to watch competing Scout troops hurtle round the track in their home-made pedal cars. There was a monthly Church Parade, when Scouts, Cubs, Guides and Brownies assembled at the bottom of Wernbrook Street and then marched up Blendon Terrace to St Margaret's Church, to take part in the 11 o'clock Communion service. There, our respective flags were carried aloft and taken up to the altar rail where the vicar, Canon Reggie Morecambe, received them and placed them beneath the big east window, to be collected and processed out of the church at the end of the service. The Cubs' flag was green and yellow, with the wolf's head motif in the centre and the name of our Pack written above and below. I must have carried it a few times, I guess. I loved to see its polished brass top glinting in the sunlight and hear its fabric snapping in a stiff breeze. There was an annual St George's Day Parade in Woolwich that all the area Packs and Troops attended. The parade took us past the steps of the Town Hall on Wellington Street, where the Mayor, resplendent in his scarlet and fur gown, white lace stock, black cocked hat and chain of office, stood to take the salute. Then on to one of the

town's bigger churches, like St Thomas's, behind the Odeon cinema, for a special service at which *inter alia* we all had to renew our Scout's Promise.

I remember the Cubs with pleasure, not least because we had what would today be called really 'cool' young adults in charge. Akela, the Cubmistress herself, was Eileen Flanagan, Chil was Eric Miller, Rikki was Bill Dick (my friend and neighbour John's dad), and Bhageera was Michael Balding. They were all friendly, approachable and good fun to be with, even though they did represent 'authority'. I often wonder how silly they felt with names taken from Kipling's *Just-So Stories.* Eric was Head Boy at the Roan School and was my hero; my decision to put the Roan first choice after I passed the eleven-plus was influenced in no small measure by that link.

I can't leave this section on my time in the Cubs without mentioning *The Goon Show*. I shall forever associate Cub night with that legendary radio programme. It must have come on air at almost the same moment as we were all leaping to our feet from a wolf-cub crouch shouting 'dob dob dob', to signal the end of proceedings. Each week I would grab my coat, scoot across 'our' corner of the Common and race up the steps to our house in St John's Terrace, to try and catch the show as it started. The Goons were firm favourites with my mum and me; for years afterwards we would talk to each other in those zany voices, like the one that Peter Sellers used for Bluebottle: "All right, my Captain?" or Spike Milligan's "He's fallen in the water." Our regular greeting was, "Hello, Jim!" in the manner of Harry Secombe.

The whole 'gang' at the 1956 Woolwich Gang Show. I am the first one to the right of the microphone in the front row. My Dad is sixth from the right in the centre row, in his DJ as a member of the band. It will be hard for readers to pick out faces I know, but at least it gives some idea of the size of the outfit!

For me, the undisputed highlight of my time in the Cubs and the Scouts was the Woolwich Gang Show. Held every year during the second week of the Easter holiday. It was in essence a variety show, written, produced and performed entirely by Scouts. Years after I trod the boards of the Woolwich Town Hall theatre for the last time in 1959 it became 'Swingalong' and girls joined the company or 'gang'. But in my day it was an all-male affair, except for the ladies who did wardrobe and make-up. The songs and a good many of the sketches were written by Ralph Reader, who founded and ran the legendary London Gang Show. Most people outside the Scout movement know little or nothing of the Gang Show, but if they have heard of one thing it will be its signature number:

We're riding along on the crest of a wave,
And the sun is in the sky-ee-eye;
All of our eyes, on
The distant horizon,
Look out for passers-by.
We'll do the hailing,
While other ships are out a-sailing.
We're riding along on the crest of a wave,
And the world is ours!

Woolwich Scout Gang Show 1956.
The choir boys featured in a musical number, called, The Little Dears.
Back row L to R: John Stanley, Neil Stevens, John Nevill, Michael Paine.
Front row L to R: Brian Semple, Chris Martyn, Michael Fox, Freddie Phelan.
All but two of them (Fox and Phelan) were also my classmates at St Margaret's School.

Singing that at full volume in a choir of a hundred voices under bright stage lighting with a 'proper' pit-orchestra was truly exhilarating, enhanced by the GS uniform of white shirt, white shorts, socks and shoes and a red neck-scarf secured at the throat by its special woggle. When in 1954 dad was asked to join the band - on tenor sax and clarinet - mum and I watched his first show from the balcony. I was utterly enthralled. Although it was actually the work of enthusiastic amateurs, the show had very high production values, thanks to Les Paine, a local builder and father of my chum Michael, who was the man in charge. The sheer professionalism of what I saw that night made me ache to be part of it from then on. It was colourful, pacey, and definitely set your foot tapping. I auditioned successfully for the next year's show and soon started Saturday afternoon rehearsals at Conway Road School. When you weren't 'on', you had the run of the ground floor and the playground. We had a great time messing about, making new friends from other packs and troops. I did five shows altogether. The most memorable will be the later ones, when I was a Scout. There are photographs of me in various costumes, choirboy's cassock and surplice for *The Little Dears* and full Highland rig for *McDougall's Song* in which I was the main man. I was put into a number of dance numbers and for that had to wear tap shoes and go to the local dance school for lessons with Pat Beadle at her studio on the corner of Wrottesley Road. Pat was something I'd never met before, a dyed-in-the-wool stage professional. Her dancing days were over by then, but she still had an unmistakeable theatrical air about her, and stood with splayed feet like every dancer I've ever known. She was seriously short-sighted too; the colourful and elegant frames of her glasses couldn't quite disguise the 'bottle-bottom' lenses they supported. Pat was a real lady.

My time in the Scouts was similar to what I had experienced in the Cubs, although in the promotion stakes I only made it to Second of the Cobra Patrol. I got another two studious person's proficiency badges (Musician and Interpreter) and managed to avoid pretty well all outdoor activities, especially camping. No mean achievement, I can assure you. But the weekly round of British Bulldog, stave fights, Kim's Game and so forth in the so-called 'gym' of St Margaret's School was OK. Because I was vaguely literate I was elected 'Scribe' or Minutes Secretary to the 'Court of Honour', of which only Patrol Leaders and their Seconds were members; it was this élite group, under the watchful eye of Sid Shaw the Scoutmaster, that made decisions about the programme for Troop nights and so forth. Sid was one of the nicest people I have ever known; gentlemanly, mild-mannered and softly spoken, fair-minded, thoughtful and kind . . not at all like the stereotype of the Scout Leader who is usually depicted as some kind of neo-Nazi or a chinless wimp. Thankfully, I did not share my mother's unpleasant reservations about the Scouts in general and about Scoutmasters in particular: I really think she believed them all to be a bit strange, though she never actually said so. She disapproved of almost everything the Scouts did: Bob-a-Job was simply 'begging', and spending the night under canvas was a short route to catching pneumonia. The latter was a recurrent theme all through my childhood, and she was still saying 'Do wrap up warm, son' when I was in my fifties. I was not allowed to sit on stone steps, or park benches after rain, or anything that might be chilly and damp: 'death-traps', all of them!

To pass your Second Class you had – among other things - to cook something on an open fire. This could not be arranged for a regular troop night but had to be done when you were

away at camp. But I didn't go to camp, did I. So one Saturday dad and I walked over to the Woodman to catch the 126 bus to Bromley, and then another from there to Downe where the 8th Woolwich were camping for the weekend. There, I had to make and light a fire, mix up some flour and water and cook it in lard, in a skillet, until I had something that may have resembled a pancake. Then I had to eat it. No sugar, no lemon. It was not so much disgusting as utterly tasteless and very chewy. Then we got on the bus and went home. I got my Second Class and the badge to prove it, but at what cost! I was intensely embarrassed by the whole episode, not least having my father lurking in the background. Ah, the joys of being an only child with over-protective parents!

Although fifty years have passed since I had anything to do with the Scout movement, I have watched from the side-lines, as it were, and have been gratified to see it successfully adapt to changing times and changing ideas. I still have my copy of Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys*, first published in 1908 during the heyday of the British Empire. It made quaint reading in 1955, never mind in 2009, with its camp fire yarns, a chapter on the chivalry of Knights, another on endurance or 'how to be strong', and the author's undisguised admiration for the stories of Rudyard Kipling. Being a Cub and a Scout taught me lots of good things, like self-reliance, honesty and the value of friendship. But above all, it gave me a taste for performance. I realised straight away that I was the complete 'stage animal'. Un-phased by the dazzling lights or by the pressure of remembering the words and music, I was truly at home in front of a big, expectant audience and unashamedly relished their applause. Years later I made a semi-professional career out of singing, to go alongside the day job of teaching English to sixth form college students. Playing the part of the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto* or Don José in *Carmen*, or singing the tenor solos in Handel's *Messiah* or the Verdi *Requiem* were in some ways a far cry from *McDougall's Song*, but I see plenty of continuity there. Had it not been for the opportunities presented to me by the 8th Woolwich I might never have strutted my stuff anywhere. The debt is a big one.

Some typical Cubs of that earlier era.

The Haywards & Ansetts In Plumstead, 1890s–1930s.

Vic Coughtrey

My maternal grandmother, Rosa Hayward, was born in the Portobello Road, North Kensington, in 1874. Sometime in the 1890s her father, Henry Hayward, became a guard on the London, Chatham and Dover Railway, based at Plumstead Station, so he moved with his wife and daughter to Chestnut Rise, Plumstead.

My maternal grandparents, Reuben and Rosa, was probably taken around 1905, shortly after my uncle Frank was born and five years before my mother was born. They were living in Parkdale Road, Plumstead by that time, and the address on the back of the photograph shows that the photographer was based in Woolwich.

Soon afterwards, probably in 1898, Rosa married Reuben Ansett, a stoker (possibly in the Woolwich Royal Arsenal) and they set up house at 114 Parkdale Road, Plumstead.

My uncle Frank was born at that address in 1904 and my mother, Grace, in 1910. The two children attended Ancona Road School, which they both remembered with great fondness to the ends of their lives. They often mentioned the kindness and patience of the teachers, but admitted that it wasn't difficult for the teachers to maintain this approach, as the children turned up at the school gates with the required respect for authority already instilled into them by their parents.

Uncle Frank won a medal at a schools violin-playing competition, at Crystal Palace, in about 1914. My grandmother proudly mentioned this medal very many times, but the only public

performances my uncle ever gave, once he'd left school (Ancona Road, Plumstead), was with an amateur dance band in the late '20s called Frank Syncopated. My father (also Frank) was on drums and my mother played the piano. For decades the violin remained unplayed in the attic of my uncle's house in Bexleyheath until he died in about 1985. He lost a finger in an accident at work (he was a joiner) while still young and this was probably the reason he stopped playing.

Uncle Frank Ansett, second from right, standing, front row, with other medal-winners in about 1914.

But that didn't stop boys being boys. My grandmother used to take a delight in telling me of some her son's escapades with his little 'gang', which included Harry Harper and Henry Roe. Their most infamous exploit was to post packets of horse manure (readily available then, of course) through letterboxes along Lakedale Road. They were caught and severely dealt with. I also used to hear a lot about adventures in Bostall Woods and some where I understood to be 'Slay Dollar'. I now realise this was probably Slade Hollow, (Cockney Accent!) although I can't find a reference to such a place on the map.

My grandfather Reuben died in 1912, when my mother was two years old. Two years later the Great War broke out and my grandmother started work at the Arsenal. Whether this was purely from economic necessity or she was drafted, (as many women were) I don't know. The fact is that she hated the work and used to cry when she hadn't the strength in her wrists to unscrew the caps of the shells in order to insert the detonators. During her long hours at work, it was her mother who looked after the children.

When the war ended, in 1918, she got a job as a lavatory attendant in the Blackwall Tunnel under the Thames between Greenwich and Poplar. While working there she met Alf Coughtrey, who was the passenger lift operator in the tunnel (you were allowed to walk through the tunnel in those days). Alf was a widower, and the two married in about 1924, when Rosa was 50. She then moved with her two children into Alf's flat, in Silvertown - 'over the water', as Plumstead people used to refer to Silvertown and North Woolwich, on the opposite bank of the river. The flat above a shop (owned by Alf) was crowded, to say the least, as Alf had eight or nine children from his previous marriage. My mother eventually married one of these step-brothers, who became my father. Thus, my mother's mother was married to my father's father, which complicated the family tree a bit!

My mother in 1929, aged 19. The photo was one of several taken between 1929 and 1931 at Jerome's Studios in Woolwich, where she was a colourist. (There was no colour photography at that time and photos, when required,were coloured by hand). Of the many jobs my mother had in her life, she always said this was her favourite job.

The connections with Plumstead and Woolwich weren't severed immediately, when my grandmother married Alf and left Parkdale Road. When my uncle Frank left school at 14, he was apprenticed to Woolwich Council and eventually became a joiner for them, so after the move to Silvertown, in 1924, he had to commute to work via the Woolwich Free Ferry. In 1928 he married a Plumstead girl, Ethel Martindale, and bought a house in Abbey Wood, where they lived until moving a bit further out to Bexleyheath, in the 1940s.

My Uncle Frank, (photo on right) was apprenticed to a joiner when this picture was taken in about 1922. In about 1928 he married Ethel Martindale, and they settled down in Abbey Wood, later moving to a semi in Bexleyheath, where he lived for the rest of his life. He remained a joiner by trade, so was known by the Coughtrey tribe as 'Chopper'. He hated this nickname and apparently was furious if ever he heard anyone use it. Oddly, his own mother and sister referred to him only as 'Chopper', except when he paid his monthly Sunday visits to us in Normandy Avenue and later Connaught Road. As I remember it, only two things happened during these visits. Either my uncle impressed my grandmother and mother and irritated my father by boasting of all the amazing middle-class gadgets he'd bought, such as a washing machine and refrigerator, or he shocked and offended my mother and grandmother by proclaiming his atheism. There were many acrimonious and deafening debates as a result of this, usually ending in tense silence until teatime, when all was healed by the sumptuous spread (laid on every Sunday, whether my uncle was there or not).

My parents' wedding, Christmas Day, 1934. About ten years earlier my mother's mother had married my father's father and had moved in with her two children and his 8 or 9 children above the shop in Silvertown. The fact that my mother married her step-brother, so that both she and my grandmother changed their names from Ansett to Coughtrey in a short space of time has thrown a number of genealogists into confusion! Of all my uncles, I can definitely identify only my mother's brother Frank Ansett, on my father's right (your left) and, with a bridesmaid between them, his wife Ethel (born Martindale), the thin woman standing. But Tom, Eddie, Horace, Stan, George, Wally and my aunt Eva are all there! The one son who is missing is Bill, by the first marriage, who was killed in the First World War. On the lower right are my great grandmother Rosa Hayward, my grandmother Rosa Coughtrey and my grandfather Alf Coughtrey. Note the gloves that my father had to wear because of dermatitis caused by working in his father's shoe repair shop.

He remained a joiner for Woolwich Council until he retired in 1973. During the late 1920s and early '30s my mother also commuted every day, via the ferry, to her job as a colourist in Jerome's photographic studio in Powis Street, Woolwich. This continued until she married my father in 1934 and moved to Manor Park, and later High Barnet, where I was born.

On our favourite hill overlooking Farnborough airfield in 1951. On this spot the following year, several people were killed when John Derry's DH110 disintegrated. We weren't there because, to my initial disgust, we were staying with Uncle Eddie.

My great-grandmother (also Rosa) continued to live in Chestnut Rise, Plumstead, often visited by her daughter and two grandchildren, until her death in 1936, so she lived there for about 40 years.

In the 1960s I took my mother on a nostalgia trip around her old haunts in Plumstead. She was surprised, even a bit disturbed I think, to find that nothing had changed. She would have been even more surprised had she been able to accompany me on a trip I made in 2004, because there had *still* been very little change. I took many photographs on that trip, but, unfortunately, my camera was stolen on the way home. I hope to go back before long to take some more photos.

My great-grandmother Rosa Hayward, August 1930, aged 76. It was taken at the studios in Woolwich where her granddaughter, my mother, worked as a colourist.

The Woolwich town centre, which has changed pretty drastically, was the 'big city' for my mother's family. They never seemed to stray much further from Plumstead than that, except for the annual hop-picking week in Kent and the occasional day-trip to the seaside at Margate.

Perhaps the biggest changes in the area have been the vast Thamesmead and Thamesmere developments, built on the former Woolwich Marshes.

My cousin Tony Ansett in 1931. The photo was taken at Jerome's Studios in Woolwich, where my mother was a colourist. She had hand coloured this photo.

Story and photos with kind permission of Vic Coughtrey.

Extracts from his family history website at: http://www.coughtrey.me.uk.

The Hulks At Woolwich

The Victorian Dictionary compiled by Lee Jackson

Woolwich 1777. Prisoners being rowed ashore.

The terrible fate that many of the prisoners suffered whilst confined in the stinking prison hulks that were moored at Woolwich and near the Plumstead Marshes and Arsenal on the River Thames is graphically and meticulously told in the following excerpt from Victorian London - Publications - Social Investigation/Journalism - The Criminal Prisons of London and Scenes of London Life (The Great World of London), by Henry Mayhew and John Binny, 1862 - The Convict Prisons of London - The Hulks at Woolwich.

THE HULKS AT WOOLWICH

Half an hour's journey along the North Kent Railway, past the rising meadows near Blackheath, and the bright toy villas, planted in the centre of the greenest conceivable lawns, which make the neighbourhood of Charlton - then through a long dark tunnel - will deposit the traveller within five minutes' walk of the Dockyard gates of Woolwich. The sign of the public-house, "THE WARRIOR," which shows a gaudy front close to the station, suggests at once the proximity of the hulks. The lazy men, in cotton-velvet-fronted waistcoats, leaning against the door-posts; strong musters of very dingy children; remarkably low shops, exhibiting all kinds of goods at wonderfully cheap prices; and street after street of little houses, where the wives of the regularly employed dock labourers advertise the nature of their industry; in their parlour windows-indicate the neighbourhood of a great industrial

establishment. Turning from the entrance of the Dockyard, opposite which is a flourishing public-house; rejoicing in the suggestive sign of "THE OLD SHEER HULK," which probably reminds some of its customers of peculiarly "good old times" and keeping the high, dark walls of the yard on the left; the way lies past little shops and beer establishments on the right, towards the Arsenal. From the elevated churchyard, crowded with graves, the sharp outlines of which are rounded by the waving of the uncut grass, the first view of the river, with the flat Essex marshes beyond, is obtained. Here, immediately opposite the yard, rises the bulky form of the great "WARRIOR" hulk, which, the authorities declare, can hardly hold together. Painted black and white, and with her naked and puny-looking spars degraded to the rank of clothes-props for the convicts, she stands in curious contrast to the light steamers that dance by her, and to the little sloops laden with war stores, and bound for Sheerness or Portsmouth, that glide like summer flies upon the surface of the stream, almost under her stern. From the churchyard, veering to the right along the busy little High Street, the way lies past a long line of shop windows, displaying capacious tea-pots, flanked by wondrously variegated tea-cups, and offering tempting advantages to the lovers of "a comfortable tea." A dead wall still further suggests the neighbourhood of the hulks; for there the posting-bill of the Woolwich theatre offers to the aspiring youth of the locality the lessons of "THE CHAIN OF CRIME; *or, The Inn on Hounslow Heath!*" Then, before the Arsenal gates, which are protected by three or four stern policemen, a broad avenue is seen at noon, marked by a double row of women, standing with their arms akimbo, and with baskets of the freshest and reddest-looking radishes upon the ground before them, waiting for the coming of the labourers, who are about to leave the Arsenal for dinner.

As we pass through the Arsenal gate, noticing a long gun pointed right through the portal, we are asked where we are going. "To the 'DEFENCE' Hulk," we answer. Forthwith, we are ushered into one of the lodges at the side of the gate, where our name, address, and profession are inscribed in a police book. We are then told to pass on to the water's edge, where we shall find a policeman who will hail the hulk. Through groves of tumbled wheels and masses of timber, past great square buildings, from the roofs of which white feathers of steam, graceful as the "marabout," dart into the clear air, and through the doors of which the glow of fires and the dusky figures of men are seen; we go forward to the flag-staff near the water's edge, and close to the bright little Arsenal pier, with its red lamps, and that long iron tube under it, through which the shells are sent to the sloops moored alongside. A heavy mist lies upon the marshes on the opposite bank of the river; yet, in the distance, to the right of the "DEFENCE", Barking Church is visible.

The "DEFENCE" and "UNITÉ", moored head to head, with the bulky hammock-houses reared upon their decks, their barred port-holes, and their rows of convicts' linen swinging from between the stunted poles which now serve them as masts, have a sombre look. From this point we can just see, nearly a mile farther down the river, the heavy form of the "WARRIOR" moored close alongside the Dockyard, with the little, ugly "SULPHUR" (the washing-ship) lying in the offing. Meantime, the policeman, placing himself in a prominent position upon the pier, has hailed the officer in the gangway of the "DEFENCE;" and in a few minutes afterwards a long "gig," pulled by four convicts, in their brown dresses and glazed hats, parts from the hulk; and showing in the stem the stiff, dark form of an officer, steering

directly for the landing-place, upon which we are standing. As the boat touches the shore, one of the convicts places a little mat upon the cushioned seats, upon which we tread as we jump into the craft, telling the officer that we have an order for the governor. With wonderful precision the convict boatmen obey the orders of the officer, and point the boat's bows back again to the gangway of the hulk. In a few minutes we are aboard; and, as we pass up the gangway steps, we hear one officer repeat to the other - "For the governor!" And then a warder, with a bright bunch of keys attached by a chain to his waist, conducts us to the governor's drawing-room - a pretty apartment, where, from the stern-windows of the hulk, there is a very picturesque view of the river.

The History of the Hulks.

The idea of converting old ships into prisons arose when, on the breaking out of the American War of Independence, the transportation of our convicts to our transatlantic possessions became an impossibility. For the moment a good was effected, for the crowded prisons were relieved; but from the time when the pressure upon the prisons ceased, down to the present, when the hulks may be said to be doomed; all writers on penology have agreed in condemning the use of old ships for the purposes of penal discipline. If, however, we follow the wording of the 19th Geo. III., cap. 74, in which the use of ships for prisons is referred to, we shall perceive that an idea of turning convict labour to account, for cleansing the Thames and other navigable rivers, had probably directed the attention of government to the possibility of arranging ships for their crowds of convicts.*

[*The section of the act referred to, runs thus: "And, for the more severe and effectual punishment of atrocious and daring offenders, be it further enacted That, from and after the First Day of July, one thousand seven hundred and seventy-nine, where any Male Person . . . shall be lawfully convicted of Grand Larceny, or any other Crime, except Petty Larceny, for which he shall be liable by Law to be transported to any Parts beyond the Seas, it shall and may be lawful for the Court . . . to order and adjudge that such Person . . . shall be punished by being kept on Board Ships or Vessels properly accommodated for the Security, Employment, and Health of the Persons to be confined therein, and by being employed in Hard Labour in the raising Sand, Soil, and Gravel from, and cleansing, the River Thames, or any other River Navigable for Ships of Burden," &c., &c.]

The "JUSTITIA," an old Indiaman, and the "CENSOR," a frigate, were the first floating prisons established in England. This system, though condemned by such men as Howard and Sir William Blackstone,* [*London Prisons, by Hepworth Dixon, page 124.] was not only persevered in, but extended; till, on the 1st of January, 1841, there were 3,552 convicts on board the various hulks in England.*

[*In 1841, the gross number of convicts received on board the hulks in England during the year was 3,625, and these were natives of the following countries, in the following proportion:

3,108 were born in England, 80 were born in Wales.

229 were born in Scotland.

180 were born in Ireland.

13 were born in British Colonies.

15 were born in Foreign States.

Their occupations had been as follows:

304 had been Agriculturists.

1,176 had been Mechanics and persons instructed in manufactures.

1,986 had been Labourers and persons not instructed in manufactures.

82 had been Domestic servants.

69 had been Clerks, shop men, and persons employed confidentially.

8 had been Superior class, or men of education.

As regards the religion of these same 3,625 convicts, the subjoined are the statistics:

2,934 belong to the Established Church.

269 belong to the Roman Catholic ditto.

167 belonged to the Scotch ditto.

245 were Dissenters.

9 were Jews.

1 were of "another denomination."

Concerning their prison "antecedents"-

1,451 were first-offence men.

487 had been in prison before.

1625 had been convicted before.

10 had been in penitentiary.

52 had been transported before.

Their ages were as follows.

3 were under 10 years old.

213 were from 10 to 15 years old.

958 were from 15 to 20 years old.

1612 were from 20 to 30 years old.

839 were above 30 years old.

Lastly:

1,103 were married.

2,522 were single.]

In 1854 the numbers so confined had been reduced to 1298.

Some idea of the sanitary condition of these establishments, even so recently as 1841, may be gathered from the report of Mr Peter Bossy, surgeon of the "WARRIOR" hulk, off Woolwich, which shows that in that year, among 638 convicts on board, there were no less than 400

cases of admission to the hospital, and 38 deaths! At this period there were no less than 11 ships (including those stationed at Bermuda, and the "Euryalus," for juvenile convicts) used by the British government for the purposes of penal discipline - if discipline, the then state of things could possibly be called. There are still officers in the Woolwich hulks who remember a time when the "Justitia" (a second "Justitia," brought from Chatham in 1829) contained no less than 700 convicts; and when, at night, these men were fastened in their dens - a single warder being left on board ship, in charge of them! The state of morality under such circumstances may be easily conceived - crimes impossible to be mentioned being commonly perpetrated.*

[*Even so late as 1849, we find the "Unité", hospital ship at Woolwich, described in the following terms.- "In the hospital ship, the 'Unité,' the great majority of the patients were infested with vermin; and their persons, in many instances, particularly their feet, begrimed with dirt. No regular supply of body-linen had been issued; so much so, that many men had been five weeks without a change; and all record had been lost of the time when the blankets had been washed; and the number of sheets was so insufficient, that the expedient had been resorted to of only a single sheet at a time, to save appearances. Neither towels nor combs were provided for the prisoners' use, and the unwholesome odour from the imperfect and neglected state of the water-closets was almost insupportable. On the admission of new cases into the hospital, patients were directed to leave their beds and go into hammocks, and the new cases were turned into the vacated beds, without changing the sheets.]

Indeed, we were assured by one of the warders, who had served under the old hulk *"regime,"* that he well remembers seeing the shirts of the prisoners, when hung out upon the rigging, so black with vermin that the linen positively appeared to have been sprinkled over with pepper; and that when the cholera broke out on board the convict vessels for the first time, the chaplain refused to bury the dead until there were several corpses aboard, so that the coffins were taken to the marshes by half a dozen at a time, and there interred at a given signal from the clergyman; his reverence remaining behind on the poop of the vessel, afraid to accompany the bodies, reading the burial-service at the distance of a mile from the grave, and letting fall a handkerchief, when he came to "ashes to ashes and dust to dust," as a sign that they were to lower the bodies.

It was impossible that a state of things so scandalous could last; and the successive reports of the directors of convict prisons are evidence of the anxiety with which they urged upon the government the reform - if not the abandonment of the hulk system altogether; for, to the disadvantages inseparable from the conduct of prison discipline on board ship, the governors of hulks were forced to add the rottenness of the vessels entrusted to them. They were expected to govern five hundred convicts in a ship, the same as in a convenient building, and to keep them healthy - in a rotten leaky tub!

The completion of the Portsmouth Convict Prison, in 1852, at length effected an important reduction in the hulk establishments. The "YORK" was given over to the Admiralty to be broken up. In 1851 the "DEFENCE" had been moved to Woolwich to replace two unserviceable hulks, and the "WARRIOR", which lies off Woolwich Dockyard, and is still called the model hulk, had been reported as unsound. It will be seen, by the accompanying extract from the directors' report for 1852, that they again drew attention to the "WARRIOR";

while in their last report (1854) they have, once more, ventured into a few details.

"The 'WARRIOR,'" say they, "is patched up as well as her unsoundness will permit, but there is no knowing how soon she may become quite unfit for further use, and it will be advisable to take the earliest opportunity that offers of transferring the prisoners to some more suitable place of confinement, as any serious repairs would be quite thrown away on so decayed a hulk, if indeed they would be practicable." To this remonstrance of the directors the governor added his own, in these emphatic words- "It is well known that the hulk is in a most dilapidated condition, and scarcely able to hold together. Recent repairs, supporting the lower deck, &c., have rendered her safe from any immediate danger; but the remedy is merely temporary. She is rotten and unsound from stem to stern."

Still the "WARRIOR" remains, in spite of such remonstrances as these, with canvas drawn over her leakages, to keep the damp from the wards, moored off the Woolwich dockyard, with 436 convicts between her crumbling ribs.

Before passing from this brief history of the hulks, to paint their actual condition, the labour performed by their inmates, and the regulations under which they are conducted, we will quote a paragraph from the general remarks of the directors, addressed to the government at the beginning of last year on this subject:- "Our opinion on the disadvantages of the hulks, as places of confinement for prisoners, has been so strongly expressed in previous annual reports, that we feel it unnecessary here to say more than that we consider these disadvantages radical and irremediable, and to urge the necessity of adopting every opportunity that may offer of substituting for them prisons on shore, constructed, as at Portland and Portsmouth, with sleeping cells for all the prisoners. Now that the transportation of criminals can only be carried on to a small extent, it appears of very great importance that every defect in connection with their imprisonment which might lessen the prospect of its being effectual as a punishment, and also as a means of their reformation, should be got rid of as speedily as possible, and *of such defects we know none at all approaching in magnitude to the association of the convicts in the prison hulks.*" It should be remembered, let us add, by the opponents of the ticket-of-leave system, that although it is from these condemned hulks, where the men are herded together and are pretty well free to plot and plan as they please; that they are turned upon society, nevertheless, according to the directors' report just quoted, of five hundred and forty-four convicts discharged in 1854 from the Woolwich hulks only, and one hundred and six discharged before that period - in all six hundred and fifty convicts - there have been but six received back with licenses revoked for misconduct.

As we have already remarked, however, the hulks are doomed. At the present time the "WARRIOR", lying off Woolwich Dockyard; the little "SULPHUR," a floating wash-tub for the convicts, lying opposite the "WARRIOR;" the "DEFENCE," lying off Woolwich Arsenal; and the "UNITÉ," made fast to the "DEFENCE," and used as the hulk hospital (together with the "STIRLING CASTLE," the invalid depot, and the "BRITON" convict hospital at Portsmouth) are the only "floating prisons" in England - though, by and by, the "WARRIOR," floats only once a fortnight.*

[*STATEMENT OF THE NUMBER OF PRISONERS RECEIVED ON BOARD THE CONVICT

ESTABLISHMENTS AT WOOLWICH, AND ALSO OF THE DISPOSAL OF SUCH PRISONERS, BETWEEN THE 1st JANUARY, 1854, AND DECEMBER, 1854.

Number on board	"Warrior."	"Defence."	Total
Remaining on board January 1st, 1854	421	521	942
Admitted during the year	273	298	571
Total	694	819	1513
How disposed of			
Discharged to Colonies	25	29	54
Sent to other Prisons	21	22	43
Pardoned	190	216	406
Sent to Lunatic Asylums	0	1	1
Invalided to "Stirling Castle"	5	8	13
Escaped	1	1	2
Died	11	16	27*
Total	253	293	546
Remaining December 31, 1854	441	526	967
Grand Total	694	819	1513
Average daily number of prisoners	436	515	951

* 1,270, J. S., on the 20th July, drowned accidentally in canal. 1,240, J. M., on the 20th June, died suddenly from apoplexy on board the "Defence."

The expense to the country of the hulk establishment (including the "STIRLING CASTLE" and "BRITON" at Portsmouth), in 1854, the date of the last returns, was £43,545 0s. 7d. Of this sum the cost of management (including the salaries, rations, and uniforms of officers) was nearly £14,000, and that of victualling and clothing the prisoners about £20,000; while the remainder was made up principally of gratuities to convicts (about £3,000), clothing, and travelling expenses of liberated prisoners (upwards of £1,500), medicine, and medical comforts for the sick (£1,860 odd), fuel and light (£l,500), &c.

The hulk System, condemned, as we have already observed, from the date of its origin to the present time, has been the despair of all penal reformers. *Originally adopted as a makeshift under pressing circumstances,* these old men-of-war have *remained during nearly half a century* the receptacles of the worst class of prisoners from all the jails of the United Kingdom; a striking instance of the inertness of government, as well as of its utter callousness as to the fate or reformation of the criminal.

Convicts who have undergone the reformatory discipline of Millbank and Pentonville, are at

the hulks, suddenly brought into contact with offenders who have undergone no reformatory discipline whatever. All the care which has been taken at Pentonville and at Millbank to prevent the men talking together, and associating with one another, is thrown away, since the first freedom granted to the convict undergoing penal servitude is given when he reaches the hulks, and finds himself in a "mess," where he will probably meet with *one* old companion in crime at least. The authorities declare that in these messes only "rational" conversation is permitted, but it is very clear that forty or fifty men cannot be crammed into one side of a ship's deck, put together upon works, and swung elbow to elbow in hammocks at night without finding ample opportunity for free conversation.

Whatever good is effected, therefore, by the systems of Millbank and Pentonville is effectually destroyed at Woolwich. The reformed convict from Pentonville is at the hulk establishments cast among companions from whom the separate system sought to wean him, while he is put to labour of the hardest and least interesting character. He was, perhaps, a shoemaker, or a tailor, or weaver at Pentonville; at Woolwich, however, he has to lay aside the craft that he has only just learnt, and is set to scrape the rust from shells, or else stack timber. Here he is not only thrown amongst brutal companions, whom it was before considered perdition to allow him to associate with, and even to *see,* but put to do the lowest description of labour - in some instances at the muzzle of a guard's carbine - and impressed with the idea that it is the very *repulsiveness* of this labour which is his punishment, so that it is strange, indeed, if the lessons of Pentonville have not been utterly erased from his memory, granting that the imposed dumbness of the " silent system," or the physical and mental depression induced by the separate system, to have worked some permanent salutary effect on his heart."The hulk system was continued," says Mr Dixon, "notwithstanding its disastrous consequences soon became patent to all the world; and it still flourishes - if that which only stagnates, debases, and corrupts, can be said to flourish - though condemned by every impartial person who is at all competent to give an opinion on the matter, and this because the labour of the convicts is found useful and valuable to the government - a very good reason for still employing convict labour upon useful public works, but no reason at all for continuing the hulks in their present wretched condition."

As we have already remarked, this labour is of the description called "hard;" that is to say, it is the exercise of irksome brute force, rather than the application of self-gratifying skill; still, those persons who are familiar with the working of a dockyard or an Arsenal, know that this "hard" work is valuable in both establishments; for in the general report of the directors on time results of 1854, under the head of "Earnings and Expenses," we find that the labour of the convicts confined in the hulks alone was valued at £19,736 5s. 9*d.* These earnings, however, it should be observed, were exclusive of the estimated value of the labour of the convicts employed as cooks, bakers, washers, shoemakers, tailors, and others engaged in work merely for prison purposes.

The directors tell us that the kind of work performed by the convicts is chiefly labourers' work, such as loading and unloading vessels, moving timber and other materials, and stores, cleaning out ships, &c., at the dockyard; whilst at the Royal Arsenal, the prisoners are employed at jobs of a similar description, with the addition of cleaning guns and shot, and excavating ground for the engineer department - 329 prisoners, out of a daily average of 515

on board the "DEFENCE," having been so employed. "*The only artificer's work,*" add the directors, *"that the convicts have had an opportunity of performing has been, to a very small extent, in executing repairs and other jobs for the service of the hulks in which they have been confined.*"*

As regards the industry of the prisoners, the directors say "the men generally have worked *willingly* and with good effect, considering the disadvantage inseparable from their being occasionally mixed with, or in the neighbourhood of; numbers of free labourers and others - a circumstance which requires, for the sake of security, considerable restraint to be placed on their freedom of action. Punishments for idleness, though always inflicted where the offence is proved, have been by no means of frequent occurrence." ** [** *Report of the Directors of the Convict Prisons on the Discipline and Management of the Hulk Establishment,* 1854]

The "willingness" here spoken of, however, is of a very negative kind, and might be better described as resignation, or a desire to escape punishment. Nevertheless, it should in fairness be added, that the governor of the "WARRIOR" hulk reported to the directors of convict prisons in 1854, that "the valise of the convicts' labour might be favourably compared with that of an equal number of free workmen."

Value of Labour at the Hulks.

Let us turn now to the value set upon the labour of the prisoners at the hulks by the directors of convict prisons.

The report for 1854 returns the value of convict dockyard labour at 2s. 5½*d.* and a fraction daily, per man; while Arsenal convict labour, according to the same authority, is worth 2s. 4*d.* per diem; that of the convict carpenters, blacksmiths, painters, plumbers, and coopers is valued at 2s. 6d. a day, and that of shoemakers, tailors, washers, and cooks at 1s. 6d., whilst the general prison labour, working of boats, &c., is set down at only 1s. 3*d.* a day.

Now, by this scale we find that the following were the earnings of the convicts at Woolwich, "as calculated according to reasonable wages, for the different descriptions of work performed, per day of 10 hours," during the year 1854:

Name of Hulk	Average daily no. of prisoners	Number and Value of Day's Labour performed					
		By Inferior Workmen		By Superior Workmen			
		No of Days 10 hrs each	Estimated Value	No of Days, 10 hrs. each	Estimated Value	Total estimated Value	Annual Average per Head
"Defence"	515	96018	£10,067 6s. 9d.	2899,9	£342 2s. 7d.	£10,309 9s. 4d.	20 4 3
"Warrior"	436	68655,2	£8453 15s. 5d.	11691,3	£873 1s. 0d.	£9326 16s. 5d.	21 7 10
Total	951	164673,2	£18521 2s. 2d.	14581,2	£1215 3s. 7d.	£19736 5s. 9d.	20 15 0¾

Here, then, we perceive that 951 convicts on board the two Woolwich hulks performed

altogether very nearly 180,00 days' labour in the course of the year, and earned collectively, in round numbers, £20,000 or almost 20 guineas per head.*

[*The subjoined is a more detailed account of the quantity and the kind of work done by the convicts in the dockyard and arsenal at Woolwich:-

STATEMENT OF THE VALUE OF LABOUR PERFORMED IN THE ROYAL DOCKYARD, WOOLWICH, BY CONVICTS, IN THE YEAR 1854

Removing and stacking, &c., cubic timber, 2,825,073 cubic feet at 12s. per 1,000 . . . £1,965 0s 10½d.

Removing and stacking superficial timber, 1,726,555 superficial feet, at 4s. 6d. per 1,000 feet . . . £388 9s 5¾d.

Removing iron, ballast, stores, &c. 23,916 tons, at 6d. per ton . . . £597 18s. 0d.

Weighing and stacking ditto, 25,654 tons, at 4d. per ton . . . £427 11s. 4d.

Removing coals, 46,406 tons, at 7d. per ton . . . £1353 10s, 2d.

Weighing and stacking ditto, 33,586 tons, at 5d. per ton . . . £699 14s. 2d.

Carting sundries, 3,362 loads, at 6d. per load . . . £84 1s. 0d.

Spinning and balling oakum, 228cwt. at 2s. per cwt. . . . £22 16s. 0d.

Cutting up old rope. 193 tons, at 2s. per ton . . . £19 6s. 0d.

Picking oakum 119lbs., at 5 ½d. per lb. £2 14s. 6½d.

Removing, stacking, and weighing old rope, &c. 1932 tons, at 6d. per ton . . . £48 6s. 0d.

Odd jobs not measurable:- Assisting shipwrights and riggers, cleaning out sawmills, steamers, docks, and yard, testing chain cables, &c. docking and undocking vessels, cutting up old iron, staging , pitch scraping, cross-cutting timber, removing boats, &c. &c., 266,948 hours, at 10 hours per day, equal to 26,694 days 8 hours, at 2s. 4d. per day . . .£3414 7s. 10¼d.

Total value of dockyard labour £8453 15s. 5d.

STATEMENT OF THE VALUE OF LABOUR PERFORMED FOR THE ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT, ROYAL ARSENAL, BY THE CONVICTS, DURING THE YEAR END 31st DECEMBER, 1854

Removing and stacking timber, 2,222,350 cubic feet, at 12s. per 1,000 feet £1333 8s. 3d.Ditto Ditto 6,095,636 superficial feet, at 4s. 6d. per 1,000 feet £1371 10s. 4d.Making mortar, 329 cube yards at 11d. per yard £15 1s. 7d. Breaking stones, 3,525 bushels, at 5d. per bushel . . . £73 8s. 9d. Facing stones, 839 superficial feet at 5d. per foot . . . £17 9s. 7d.

Weeding, 59,787 superficial yards, at 1s. 6d. per 100 yards . . . £44 16s. 9d. Raising and removing mud, 13,070 tons, at 5½d. per ton, £299 10s. 5d. Removing and shipping stores, &c., 53,037 tons at 6d. per ton, £1325 18s. 6d. Cleaning shot and shell, 247,370 No., 1s. per 24 shot, £515 7s. 1d. Carting sundries, 44,550 loads at 6d. per load £1113 15s. 0d. Digging and removing gravel, 8,547 cube yards, at 5d. per yard, £178 1s. 3d. Making concrete, 96 cube yards, at 1s. per yard £4 16s. 0d. Odd jobs not measurable:- Cleaning saw mills, sheds, drains, tanks and cadets' barracks, making and repairing grommets, wads, &c. repairing butt and roads, assisting tradesmen, filling hollow shot, whitewashing, cutting sods, mowing, making

and stacking hay, spreading mud, clearing away now, &c.&c., 19,550 days at 2s. 4d. per day £2280 16d. 8d.Total value of arsenal labour £8574 0s. 2d.

N.B. The totals above given, thought incorrect, are copied literally from the Directors' Report.]

Convicts Gratuities - The gratuities which the convicts, labouring on the public works or in the hulks, are entitled to, are divided into "conduct gratuities" and "industry gratuities," both of which vary, according to the class to which the convict belongs. Each prisoner is entitled to his conduct gratuity irrespective of his gratuity for industry, whilst his industry gratuities are measured by the zeal with which he labours. The conduct gratuities, as arranged in the books of the governor of the "DEFENCE," stand thus:-

CONDUCT GRATUITIES. 1st Class Prisoners (receive) 9*d.* Weekly. 2nd Class Prisoners 6*d.* 3rd Class Prisoners 4*d.* The industry gratuities, or sums placed to the credit of the convicts according to the amount of work done, vary from 3*d.* for a "good" quantity of labour performed, to 6d. for a "very good" quantity.*

[*The subjoined is extracted from the governor's books:-1.} INDUSTRY GRATUITIES 2.} as per authorised scale, 3. V.G. (very good). If the number of the V.G.s is under one-third of the total number of weeks that the prisoner has been in the prison, he may receive 4d. for every V.G.; if over one-third and under two thirds of the total number, he may receive 5d.; if over two-thirds, he may receive 6d. for every V.G. G. (good). The prisoner may receive 3d. for every G. (unless the whole of the gratuities become forfeited by misconduct) O. Nil. V.B. (very bad) P. (punishment) B. (bad) I. (infirmary). Nil. The infirmary cases are liable for special considerations with reference to class and conduct but not for extra gratuity. I.A. (infirmary accident). Discretionary - being governed by the circumstances; but, as a rule, a gratuity is allowed according to the prisoner's previous conduct and industry. L. (light labour). According to class (as above), but no extra gratuity The above scale does not apply where a special scale is authorised for invalids.]

We took the trouble to inspect the books of the "DEFENCE," and can testify to the marvellous neatness and accuracy with which they are kept. When a prisoner is reported to the governor, the latter can tell, by a glance at the character-book, the conduct of the former, during every week he has spent at the hulk. At the expiration of the convicts term the character-book is summed up, the advantages resulting from the prisoner's class and industry are added together, and he has a bill made ·out of the sum due to him, in the following form, which we copied from the governor's book:-

J.C. Class I.

CONDUT			
90 weeks V.G., at 9d. per week	£3	7	6
13 weeks G., at 6d. per week	0	6	6
1 week (infirmary	0	0	6

accident) 6d.

INDUSTY

99 weeks V.G., at 6d. per week	2	9	6
4 weeks, G., at 3d. per week	0	1	0
1 week infirmary, 3d. per week	0	0	3
53 weeks (ticket-of-leave class, at 6d. per week**	1	6	6
	7	11	9
Had in private cash	0	0	4
Total	7	12	1

[** This payment of 6d. per week was the compensation made to prisoners who, after the suspension of transportation for short terms, remained in the hulks during the passing of the ticket-of-leave bill. The weekly allowance was paid to them from the date at which they would have obtained tickets had they proceeded to Australia, till they were set free from the hulks. Thus J. C. was a prisoner 53 weeks longer than he would have been confined had he been sent to the colonies.]

This man received on leaving five shillings in cash, £3 15s. in a Post-office order, payable at his declared destination. Thus a balance of £3 12s. ld. in his favour remained in the governor's hands, to which he would become entitled when a letter, of which he was furnished with a printed form on leaving the hulks, was received from him, signed by the clergyman, or some other responsible person in his neighbourhood, as a proof that he was leading an honest life.*

[*MEMORANDUM TO BE GIVEN TO A PRISONER ON DISCHARGE, IN CASE ANY BALANCE OF GRATUITY

"In the event of your conduct being satisfactory when at liberty, and that you faithfully perform the conditions printed at the back of the License, your claim to the balance of your Gratuity will be admitted on your returning this paper to me at the expiration of three months from your release, backed by the certificate of the Magistrate or Clergyman of the Parish, or other competent and known authority, that you are earning your livelihood by honest means, and have proved yourself deserving of the clemency which has been extended to you by her Majesty. "The following particulars must be carefully stated in returning this paper:-

Christian and Surname at length and Prisoner Number _____Your Occupation or Calling, or in what manner you are earning your livelihood _____The name of the Post-

Office at which the order should be made payable _____
*Prison*_____ *Governor*_____ 185]

The rule is, that if a prisoner's account when he is discharged be under £8, he may receive half on leaving, and the balance two months subsequently; whereas, if his balance exceeds £8 and be under £12, he must wait three months for the balance. In addition to the money due to him, every prisoner discharged from the hulks is provided with a new suit of clothes and a change of linen. The gross sum paid in gratuities to the convicts at the hulks amounted to upwards of £2,950 in the course of the year 1854, while the cost of the clothes and travelling expenses for the prisoners, on obtaining their liberation, was £1,650 odd.

Badges, &c.

A distinctive portion of the discipline carried on at Woolwich consists in the badges worn by the prisoners on the left arm, and the rings worn on the right. These badges are made of black leather, with an edge of red cloth, with white and black letters and figures upon it. We advanced towards some convicts who were hauling up linen to the mast to dry, and who wore both rings and badges. The first badge we examined was marked thus:-

7 V.G. 8

The 7 meant that the prisoner had been sentenced to *seven* years' transportation; the 8 that he had been in the hulk that number of months, and the V. G., that his conduct had been *very good* all the time he had been there. Another man wore a badge marked thus:-

4 G 6 8

This denoted that the prisoner was suffering *four* years' penal servitude ; that his conduct had been good during *six* months; and that he had been on board the hulk *eight* months. These badges are collected once in every month, and conveyed to the governor's office. The character-book, as filled up from the weekly reports of the warders, is gone over in each case, and, at the same time, if the prisoner has behaved badly, his badge is altered, and he loses some of the advantages of his previous good conduct.*

[*"The badges which are given as a record to the prisoner of his actual position with reference to character, have proved to be a great encouragement; and that they are prized is evidenced by the efforts made to obtain them, and to regain them by good conduct in such cases as they may have been forfeited. "The Governor of Portland Prison observes: '"The system of wearing conduct-badges on the dress, by which the monthly progress of each convict towards the attainment of his ticket-of-leave is publicly marked, works very satisfactorily, as is evinced by the anxiety of even the ill-conducted prisoners to regain a lost good-conduct mark, and the efforts to keep subsequently clear of the misconduct book." As a means of promoting good conduct, a system of classification has also been adopted; the object of which will be best understood from the rules established with reference to it, which are as follows: 'The prisoners shall be divided into three classes, to be called the first, second, and third classes. The classification shall depend, in the first instance, on the report of character and general conduct since conviction that be received with a prisoner; and subsequently, on his actual conduct, industry, and observed character under the discipline of the establishment. 6. Prisoners in either the first or second classes shall be liable to removal to a lower class for misconduct. The prisoners in the different classes shall be distinguished by

badges, indicating the particular class to which each prisoner may belong. 7. Prisoners who habitually misconduct themselves will be liable to be sent back to separate confinement, or to be removed to some penal establishment under more severe discipline. 8. The object of the classification is not only to encourage regularity of conduct and a submission to discipline in the prison, by the distinctions that will be maintained in the different classes, but to produce on the mind of the prisoners a practical and habitual conviction of the effect which their own good conduct and industry will have on their welfare and future prospects. 9. Such distinctions shall be made between the classes, and such privileges granted, as shall promote the object of giving encouragement to those whose good conduct may deserve it, provided such distinctions do not interfere with discipline nor with the execution of a proper amount of labour on public works.' - *Report on the Discipline and Construction of Portland Prison, and its connection with the System of Convict Discipline now in operation, by* Lieut.-Col. Jebb, C.B., 1850.]

Three months' good report in the character-book constitutes a V. G., or *very good,* and advances the wearer three months towards the second stage of penal servitude. Accordingly, the man's class is not marked upon his badge. But the first man whose badge we noticed upon his left arm, had also upon his right arm a blue and two red rings. The blue ring denotes the second stage of penal servitude, and the red rings, that he is a first-class convict. One red ring upon the right arm makes a second-class convict; and the third-class prisoner is known by the absence of all rings from his arm. By this system we are assured that it is almost impossible that a prisoner can be unjustly dealt with.

A Day on Board the "Defence" Hulk.

The cold, grey light of early morning gave to everything its most chilly aspect, when at five am. we stepped aboard the "DEFENCE," the old 74-gun ship, with the determination of spending an entire day with her 500 and odd inmates. Before we describe the various duties by which every day in a convict-ship is marked, let us here acknowledge how much we owe to the courtesy and to the lucid explanations of the Governor, Mr. S Byrne. As we run up the gangway of the silent hull, and survey the broad decks, and massive "galleys," and hammock-houses, in the misty light, the only sounds heard are the gurgling of the tide streaming past the sides of the black-looking vessel, and the pacing of the solitary warder-guard - the silence and the stillness of the scene in no way realizing the preconceived idea of a convict hulk. Yet, as we pass to the ship's galley, at the fore-part of the vessel, and see the copper sheathing glistening on the floor round the cook's flue, with the large black boiler above it, and the sparkling yellow fire shining through the broad bars, the sight reminds us that there are hundreds of mouths to feed below. The cook sharply rakes the burning coals; and the copper frets, and spurts, and steams, with its noisy boiling volume of the reddish-brown cocoa.

This cook is the first convict with whom we have come in contact: he is preparing the breakfasts of his fellow-prisoners, who are still sleeping under the hatches. Close at hand is the bread-room, piled with baskets and boxes; while opposite is the officers' galley, with another stove, standing on its plate of glistening copper sheathing. Above, on the forecastle, are the hammock-houses-divided off into large, black, deep cupboards-bulging over the gunwale of the ship. Then we pass the drying-houses for linen (used in wet weather), and the little cabins at the gunwale waist, where the mechanic-convicts employed on board ply

their respective handicrafts. Glancing over-head, we observe the shirts and stockings of the prisoners below dangling from the scanty rigging between the masts, and fluttering in the wind - as we had remarked about them, seen from the shore in broad daylight on another occasion.

We are now near the top deck hatchway by the forecastle; it is still barred and padlocked. Here the bayonet of the sentry on duty, glistening in the light, attracts our attention. Then we notice the heavy bright bell, swung in front of the hatchway. All is quiet yet. We can hear the water splashing amid the boats at the broad gangway, or along the shelving sides of the ship, under her barred port-holes. The warder who accompanies us, ourselves, and the sentry are still the only people on the spacious decks of the old seventy-four. The poop, given up to the governor's rooms, and to those of his deputy and officers, is railed round; while a series of chimney funnels, projecting here and there, break the regularity of the outline.

The warder proceeds to open the hatchways; and we descend, in company with him, the top deck, in order to see the men in their hammocks, before rising for their day's duties.

The "Turning-out" of the convicts - On reaching the top deck we found it divided, by strong iron rails (very like those in the zoological gardens, which protect visitors from the fury of the wild beasts) from one end to the other, into two long cages as it were, with a passage between them. In this passage a warder was pacing to and fro, commanding a view of the men, who were slung up in hammocks, fastened in two rows, in each cage or compartment of the ship. There was also a little transverse passage at the end of each ward, that allowed the officer on duty to take a side view of the sleepers, and to cast the light of his bull's-eye under the hammocks, to assure himself that the men were quiet in their beds.

The glimmering little lanterns attached to the railings, so that the warder on duty could trim them without entering the wards, were still alight. The glazed hats of the men hung up overhead, reflecting the pale beams; and the men themselves were still snoring in their dingy hammocks.

In these two compartments or wards were 105 convicts, parted off into sections, ID 1, D 2, and A 1 and A 2. *(See plan,* p. 211.) And a curious sight it was to look upon the great sleeping mass of beings within them! The hammocks were slung so close to one another that they formed a perfect floor of beds on either side of the vessel, seeming like rows of canvas-boats. But one or two of the prisoners turned on their sides as we passed along the deck, and we could not help speculating, as we went, upon the nature of the felon-dreams of those we heard snoring and half-moaning about us. How many, thought we, are with their friends once more, enjoying an ideal liberty - how many are enacting or planning some brutal robbery! - how many suffering, in imagination, the last penalty of their crimes! - how many weeping on their mother's breast, and promising to abandon their evil courses for ever! - and to how many was sleep an utter blank - a blessed annihilation for a while to their life-long miseries!

The convicts here arranged were first-class men - there being manifest advantages in the top deck over the middle and lower ones.

"The smaller proportion of illness among the prisoners on the upper deck is readily explained by their exemption from depressing causes. "According to the present system of

classification, all prisoners newly arrived who are still smarting under the pain of disgrace and separation from their homes, and have not yet recovered from the anxiety, severe discipline, and spare diet endured in jail; all whose transportation is for a long term of years or for life, and all whose character and conduct are bad, remain the tenants of the lower deck; but if the prisoner's sentence be short, and his character and conduct good, he may in three months be raised to the middle deck, and in twelve months to the upper deck, where if he once arrives, there is a strong expectation he will not leave the country; he feels he has the confidence of the officers; and a cheerful hope of regaining his home sustains and restores a healthy rigour to body and mind. "If a long-sentenced prisoner is the subject of scrofula, of ulcer, of scurvy, of general infirmity, or of any cause unfitting him for the voyage, he will become by good conduct an inmate of the middle deck, and will remain there for several years ; so that we gradually acquire an accumulation of invalids on this deck, and this is one reason of the frequent deaths of its inhabitants. "The upper deck is much drier, being further removed from the surface of the river; and, being more fully exposed to the sun, is hotter than the rest. The large size of its ports also affords better ventilation." - *Medical Report, by P. Bossy, surgeon to "The Warrior, for* 1841.]

We followed the warder towards the stern of the ship; and, at the extremity of this deck, WC crossed a grating, and reached the hatchway leading to the middle deck.

The middle deck was arranged on the same plan as that of the top one; excepting that the passage between the swinging hammocks was wider. Here 129 men were sleeping in the divisions or wards called E 1, E 2; B1, B 2. *(See plan,* p. 211.) Here, too, the officer was parading between the wards or cages, and splashing about chloride of lime that stood in buckets between the wards. It was still very dark; and the groaning, coughing, and yawning of the sleeping and waking prisoners, had anything but a cheerful effect on the mind. The air was close and unpleasant, but not remarkably so, considering that it had been exhausted by the breath of so many men since nine o clock on the previous night, when they turned in.

We had still another deck to visit; so we followed our warder and descended the hatchway to the lower decks, which was higher, and had a broader passage than the two upper ones through which we had just passed. This deck was arranged to accommodate only 240 men; but, at the time of our visit, it contained only a 190 sleepers, arranged in sections thus,

F 1, F 2, and F 3, on one side, and C 1, C 2, and C 3 on the other. *(See plan,* p. 211.) This spacious deck stretches right under the fore-part of the poop, the barred port-holes admitting but little light; still, the air is fresher than in the decks above, which receive the ascending heat from the 190 sleepers; for, by means of broad openings in the stern and bows of the ship, a constant stream of fresh air is carried through the vessel. Altogether there were, at the time of our visit, 424 convicts stowed between the decks.

The men seem to be comfortably covered, having two blankets and a rug each. The tables used for meals are unshipped, and lean against the bars of the passage; the men's boots are under their hammocks, and their clothes lie upon the benches.

Having passed through this gloomy scene we reach a narrow white-washed passage, at the head of the lower deck, and entering by a side door, we come to the solitary cells. We follow the bull's-eye carried by the warder. Presently he stops, and placing his lantern against a ride

opening in the bulkhead, throws its light upon a man in one of the cells within, who is sentenced to "forty-eight hours." Having inspected the sleeper, who is lying huddled in his brown rug upon the ground, for there are no hammocks allowed in this cell, he darkens the place once more and proceeds to the second. In solitary cell No.2, the man is sleeping in his hammock, and the scuttle is not darkened. As the light from the bull's-eye falls upon his face, the prisoner blinks his eyes, and calls, "All right!" as he rolls in his bed.

We now pass on to a cell in the bows of the ship. Here the hammock hides the man's face from our view, so we advance across immense white-washed timbers or "knees," that stand up as solid as milestones, and so on to the opposite coil in the bows. This one is empty; but the next contains a prisoner who is in for three days, on bread and water, for refusing to work in the boats. We then return to the lower deck, through a door at the opposite side to that at which we entered the solitary cell-passage. There are five such cells in all - two on either side, and one in the bows.

As we re-entered the lower deck, we found the lamp-man (a convict), in a grey Scotch cap, blowing out the lamps. He, together with the cooks' and officers' servants, are let out a little before the general call-time; their services being necessary before the prisoners are roused at half-past five o'clock, and the day's business begins.*

*We here publish a table citing the distribution of time on board the hulk, extracted from the Report of the Directors of Convict Prisons. This table, however, can give no definite idea of the work really performed, nor of the regularity with which five hundred men are made to conform to certain hours.

THE DAILY DISTRIBUTION OF TIME ON BOARD THE "DEFENCE" HULK

Occupation.

In Summer (longest day).

In Winter (shortest day).

(In intermediate seasons, the hours vary according to light).

Prisoners rise, wash, and roll up hammocks.

5.30 am.

Breakfast (officers and servants).

Cleaning classes.

In readiness to turn out to work (preparing the boats, &c.)

Labour, including landing and marching to and from working ground.

Dinner for officers and prisoners.

1 pm.

Labour, including mustering and marching to and from working ground.

Prisoners are mustered, wash, and prepare for supper.

Supper, washing-up, &c.

Evening prayers, school, and those not at school repairing clothing, &c., mustered intermediately.

Sling hammocks.

All in bed.

9.0 from 5.30am. to 8.0pm.

The deep-toned bell against the forecastle now sounded three bells. The men had been expecting the unwelcome sound; for, a few minutes before, as we traversed the lower deck to examine the air-passages and ventilators, we saw heads popped up here and there from the dingy hammocks to have a peep at us as we passed. The usual hour for rising was evidently at hand. The effect of the bell, however, was astonishing. In a minute scores and scores of men tumbled out of their beds, and were wriggling and stretching themselves in their blue shirts.

"All up! Turn out, men!" cries the officer; and the convicts are in their trousers in an inconceivably short time. "Let us go to the top deck, and we shall see how the hammocks are lashed," suggests our warder; and on ascending to the upper decks we find many of the men already dressed, and with their hammocks lashed up like huge sausages. Presently the gates were opened, and the men turned out one after another, carrying their bolster-like beds on their shoulders. "Now men, go on there! steady-steady !" exclaims the officer. "Come on, men! Come on, the rest of you!" he shouts as we reach the forecastle. The men appear in single file, some carrying one hammock and others two. Those who carry two have, in addition to their own bed, that of a fellow-prisoner, who remains below to forward other work. Some of the men are fully dressed in their brown striped convicts suit; while others are in their blue shirt sleeves. The officers continue shouting to the men, and hastening their movements. "Come on with that hammock! Come on now!" Long lines of men, with their hammocks upon their shoulders, wind along the decks. The sides of the black hammock-houses are open, discovering lettered compartments, as A 1, A 2, B 1, &c.; and the warders on duty go into the houses, and see the hammocks stowed, as the prisoners deliver them, under their proper letters, varying the work by directions, as "Shove that a bit forward there. Now then, stow away there, my lads - stow away! Do you belong here? How come your so late ?" "Any more C 1? Is that the last of C 1? Now then, come on, lads ! Move up!" "We get the whole ship up and stowed in half an hour," said our warder. "The bell went at half-past five, and you'll see, sir, we'll have all the hammocks up. Still, the brown line of men moved forward to the hammock-houses, each hammock bearing the prisoner's registered number stitched upon it, and with the word "DEFENCE" printed on the canvas. The prisoners continue to pour out as we descend again between the decks, and find that many have got the tables shipped against the bars, and the benches ranged beside them. Now some of the men are washing in buckets, placed ready over night; and others arranging their hair by the reflection of the window-pane; and others, again, scrubbing the tables ready for breakfast. Everything and everybody seem to be undergoing a cleansing process more or less searching. We next proceeded once more to the deck below, following our guide. The scene was a busy one. Some of the prisoners were still combing their hair; others were washing the

deck boards, which were shining under the plentiful supply of water; others, again, were covering the white deal tables (which are scrubbed also every morning) with painted canvas table-cloths; then there were groups of men, down on one knee, brushing their boots, while the messmen were busy at the preparations for breakfast. The tables, ranged in a row along the wards, accommodate eight prisoners each. Each man takes his turn as messman, while the service of the ward is divided. All the breakfast things are in block-tin, and they glisten as though they had never been used. Some of the men have polished theirs over-night, and tied them up in handkerchiefs, to give themselves a little extra time in the morning. "Where's your plates? Where's your plates?" cry the messmen. For water, one prisoner at a time is let out of each ward, and as soon as he returns another is. The various processes, collectively called getting-up, may now be said to he complete, and the prisoners are all fairly padlocked in their wards, under the eye of a single warder. After six o'clock in the morning, however, there are two officers upon the lower deck till nine o'clock in the evening, when the men turn in. The costume of the prisoners, as we now see them completely dressed, is the same as that worn at Pentonville, viz., rusty brown, with red stripes upon it. The chief warder enters and inquires whether all are up. "All up!" is the answer, as the men give the military salute. "There you see, sir," said our attendant, as four bells (six o'clock) rang, "all the hammocks are on deck, and the men are locked up, as I said they would be." The first business of the morning being over, the men break into groups or read. Many a one, to our astonishment, took his Bible and began reading it with no little earnestness. Here an altercation ensued between two prisoners about the tins, which one of them was still cleaning. This was promptly suppressed by a cry of "Halloa! What are you about there, losing your temper?" At this time, too, the doctor's mate appeared, carrying a wooden tray covered with physic bottles and boxes of salve, and followed by an officer holding a paper containing the "invalid list." This officer checks the distribution of the medicine.

Officers' Duties.

The ship now begins to wear an animated appearance; for at six o'clock the officers, chief warders, and cooks come on board; all those we had seen previously having been on duty throughout the night. The officers at the hulk are arranged into divisions, the first mustering 20 men, and the second 19 men. In answer to our inquiries on this subject, our attendant said,-"There's twenty in first division, and nineteen in second division, and, in addition to these, the chief warder and two principal warders. Twenty officers sleep on board one night, nineteen the next. To the first division there is one principal and the deputy-governor, while the second division is commanded by the chief warder, and one of the principal warders. Well, the first division came on duty yesterday at seven am., and will go off duty about six o'clock to-night. It's a very long stretch. The officers came on duty at half-past six this morning, and will remain on duty till six o'clock this evening. They will be on their legs all the time. They will not have more than twenty to twenty-five minutes to get their dinner. It's not only one day, but every day the same thing. They're on their legs all day long, for they are not allowed to sit down. The first night-watch comes on at eight pm. and remains on duty till half-past ten. The second watch comes on, and remains till one. Then he is relieved by the third watch, who remains till half-past three-the fourth watch doing duty till six o'clock. Now the watch that's just relieved will have a quarter of an hour to wash and shave,

for the officers muster at a quarter-past six. So you see there's not much time lost. The breakfast is served down at half-past six. This occupies till a quarter to seven. From a quarter to seven till a quarter past, the warders are at liberty; but during this time they must breakfast, clean themselves, brush their buttons and the crowns upon their collars, and be on deck to parade at quarter-past seven. Then they turn to the labour. They're just going to muster the prisoners. Perhaps you'll like to see them."

Muster and Breakfast, Diet &c

We went down once more between decks. The muster of the prisoners had just commenced. Two officers were occupied in the wards. The prisoners were all arranged behind the tables - "Silence! keep silence there!" shouted an officer; and then, while one officer called the names of the prisoners, the other marked down the absentees upon a slate. As each name was called, the man owning it responded, "Yessir," accompanying his reply with a military salute. The replies of "Yessir," in every variety of voice, ran along the wards. This ceremony over, the registering officers retired, and the warder on duty padlocked the men in once more. We then went to see the muster of the absentees - as the cooks, bakers, and the like - which was carried on in the same way as with the prisoners in the wards, only each absentee, as he cried, "Yessir," and saluted, passed out, to return to the duty from which he had been for the moment withdrawn."There you see, now," said our attendant, "every man in the ship has answered to his name. "All correct, sir!" said the registering warder to the chief. "Now, then, A ward!" was shouted down the hatchway. “This is A ward, sir," said our attendant, "coming up for breakfast." Instantly four of the convicts appeared, following one another. "That's for A ward." "B ward!" was next shouted down. "Now, then, B ward here!" And in this way the messmen of the various wards were summoned from their decks, to fetch the breakfasts of their comrades, the messmen of each deck appearing at different hatchways; for it may be here observed that there is a separate hatchway for each floor of the vessel. The messmen were now seen moving along in file towards the ship's galley, and presently they re-appeared, each man carrying a large beer-can full of cocoa, the bread being taken down in baskets, and served out by the officers at the ward-doors. At half-past six the doctor comes on board, when an officer goes round shouting in the wards, "Any men to see the doctor?" Six men appear in answer, and are formed in line near the galley-door. They are ushered one by one into the little surgery, and here, if the disease is considered at all serious, a trap-door is opened, and they are passed at once down into a little separate room underneath, prepared with "bath and other convenience."

Nine-tenths of the calls for medical assistance, however, are dismissed as frivolous, such calls being looked upon with great suspicion, as generally evincing a desire to avoid a day's labour in the Arsenal. While earmarking the six applicants for medical assistance, we also noticed four men drawn up in a line at the end of the main deck, attended by an officer. These were "reported" men, about to answer for some infraction of prison rules. We now followed the chief warder below, to see the men at breakfast. "Are the messes all right ?" he called out as he reached the wards. "Keep silence there! keep silence!" shouted the officer on duty. The men were all arranged at their tables with a tin can full of cocoa before them, and a piece of dry bread beside them, the messmen having just poured out the cocoa from the huge tin vessel in which he received it from the cooks; and the men then proceed to eat their

breakfast in silence, the munching of the dry bread by the hundreds of jaws being the only sound heard.*

[*The following is the Scale of Diet on board the "DEFENCE" hulk.

BREAKFAST (PER MAN).

12 Ounces of Bread.1 Pint of Cocoa.

DINNER (PER MAN).

6 Ounces of Meat. 1 Pound of Potatoes. 9 Ounces of Bread.

SUPPER 1 Pint of Gruel. 6 Ounces of Bread.

SOUP DAYS :-Wednesdays, Mondays, and Fridays, when the dinner stands thus -1 pint of soup, 5 ounces of meat, 1 pound of potatoes, and 9 ounces of bread. The bread, potatoes, &c., are served by contract.

GRUEL DIET.

1 pint of gruel and 9 ounces of bread for breakfast, dinner, and supper - served when men are on the sick list, in the hulk.

PUNISHMENT DIET.

1 pound of bread per day, and water.

After this we returned to where the reported prisoners were drawn up, facing the governor's house, upon the quarter-deck. They were called into the office one by one; and as the second man was called, the first re-appeared, and was marched off between two officers to a solitary cell. "This is my report for yesterday; I give one in every morning," said the officer attending us, as he went to hand the document in, together with a "cell report," stating the number of prisoners under punishment, the days they had done, &c. Next, our attention was directed to the convict boatmen, who were preparing to take the ship's messenger ashore. "They have already been on shore this morning," continued our persevering informant, to bring off the cook and chief warder. "That's the hospital cutter, sir," and our friend pointed to a little boat, rowed by two prisoners in their brown suits, and carrying three or four warders in the stern. Now, sir, our boat's just going aboard the '*Uneet*' (for such is the general pronunciation of the French name). "Here is our sick report, sir, for the day," he continued, showing us the document. "It is delivered in every morning. There are only two men on it now. One, you see, requires light labour, and the other 'low diet. "At this moment a dashing little boat, with her stern seats cushioned, and rowed by four men, pulling long oars, appeared at the gangway. "This is the gig, sir, to take the doctor away. The officers now begin to exhibit great activity, while the men below are cleaning their tables and tins - having finished their morning's meal. "That boat won't be back in time unless she's hailed," said one officer, looking towards the shore. "It only a few more minutes to seven, now." Another boat now pulled towards the ship, rowed by men wearing guernseys, marked "DEFENCE," and glazed hats that had numbers stamped upon them. "Be as quick as you can, Matthews," shouted one of the officers "it's only five minutes. Look sharp." The boat, as directed, went off to the long brown boats, and brought them alongside the gangway, to take the prisoners off to their "hard labour" in the Arsenal. "They're going to take the officers first," said our attendant. "The second division's just coming on duty now, sir." And glancing to the shore, by the side

of the bright little Arsenal pier, we could perceive a dark group of officers, standing near the landing steps - carrying bundles in handkerchiefs - their glazed caps and bright buttons sparkling in the sunlight as they moved about. "The boats are rather hard to handle, for the prisoners should all be in them at the first stroke of seven." Nine bells (seven o'clock) sounded, as we went once more below, and found that the men had just finished cleaning their tin mugs, and were gathering up the bits of chalk into bags, and arranging these same mugs on top of the inverted plates, round their tables ready for dinner. Some, too, were washing the tables again, to get ahead with their work; while others were covering their bright tin plates and mugs with the coarse table cloths, to keep the dirt from them; and others, again, were reading their Bibles, or lounging lazily about. "They know to a minute the time they have, sir; and the officers are as severely taught to obey the progress of the clock, for if they are not at the landing steps at seven precisely, the boat pushes off without them, and will not return to fetch them." The boat that had gone to bring the warders aboard was soon on its way back to the ship, crowded with the glazed caps and dark uniforms of the officers, relieved by the fresh white guernseys of the convict rowers. Seven o'clock is the hour for the officers' parade upon the quarter-deck; the object being to see that they are all sober and fit for duty. The parade over, the guard appears on deck. It consists of four men, armed with carbines, and with their cartridge boxes slung behind them by a broad black belt. This guard stands near the gangway; the men having their carbines loaded, and held ready to fire, while the prisoners pass to the boats. Looking overboard, we now perceive the convict boatmen, in their guernseys and glazed hats, bringing the two long-boats to their proper position opposite the gangway, ready for the debarkation of the prisoners on their way to their work at the Arsenal. At a quarter-past seven the officers for duty ashore are called over by the chief warder, in the presence of the deputy-governor, while a principal checks them. Twelve extra guards, composed chiefly of soldiers from the Crimea, and some wearing clasps upon their warder's uniform (an uniform, by the way, exactly resembling that of the Pentonville officers), now file down the steps, to be ready to receive the prisoners, who begin to appear above the hatchways, marching in single file towards the gangway, with a heavy and rapid tread; and it is an exciting sight to see the never-ending line of convicts stream across the deck, and down the gangway, the steps rattling, as they descend one after another into the capacious boat, amid the cries of the officer at the ship's side- "Come, look sharp there, men! Look sharp!"

Debarkation of Prisoners for Work in the Arsenal

The rowers hold their oars raised in the air, as the brown line of men flows rapidly into the cutter below, some seat themselves in the stem, but the large majority stand in a dense mass in the bottom of the long low craft, dotted here and there by the dark dress of the officers planted in the midst of them. In fine weather no less than 110 convicts are landed in each of these boats or cutters. It is pretty to watch these long boats glide slowly to the pier, their dense human freight painted brown on the stream. And scarcely has one boat landed its felon crew, before another is filled, and making for the arsenal pier and the shore. *(See engraving.)* Nor is it less picturesque to see the prisoners clamber up to the parade ground; fall in line there with military precision; separate, according to the chief officer's directions into working parties (each working party being in charge of a warder); and move off to the

scene of their day's labour, in long brown strings. This is a very curious scene, and one that it will be impossible to witness, some few years hence.

A third or surplus small cutter puts off with the few remaining prisoners, and more guards. These guards, we observe, wear cutlasses; such cutlasses being carried as a special protection, for the officers wearing them have charge of working parties employed beyond the bounds of the Arsenal; as, for instance, upon a mortar battery in the marshes. The men are now off to work. Those prisoners who remain in the ship are in the deck cabins, plying their handicraft for the use of the hulk.

We now left the hulk in the deputy-governor's gig, in company with that officer, who acted himself as steersman. "Now then, shove off! Altogether! Lay on your oars! Sharp as you can!" were the brisk orders; and as we neared the shore, the directions to the men ran, "Hold water, all of you! Pull all! Hard a-starboard! Port, there! Ship oars! "The men obeyed these nautical directions with admirable precision, and soon landed us at the arsenal stairs, amid huge stone heaps, piles of cannon tumbled about, and all bounded by long storehouses and workshops that seemed to cross each other in every direction. We accompanied the deputy-governor in his inspection of the gangs, as the convict crew stood drawn up in lines, headed by their respective officers. It is necessary to change and equalize the gangs daily, we were told, according to the work each has to perform. Here, the officers proceeded to search under the men's waistcoats, and to examine their neckcloths, so as to prevent the secretion of clothes about their persons, which would enable them to disguise themselves, and to escape among the free labourers. No less than seventeen such attempts to escape had taken place among the "DEFENCE" convicts in one year, though out of these only three got off. In 1854 there were five attempts at escape, of which but one was successful. The searching and arrangement of the working parties or gangs being effected, the officer gives the word of command, "Cover!" then, "Face-forward!" and each gang wheels off to the direction of its work, the men walking two abreast, and the rear being brought up by the officer in charge.

As the several gangs leave the parade-ground, the officer in charge gives the number of his party, and that of his men. The parties, or gangs, are numbered from 1 to 30. Thus, as one party passes, the officer calls, "Two-eight;" that is, party No. 2, containing 8 men. "Close up ! close up your party, Matthews, they're all straggling!" cries the deputy governor to one of the guards, who is taking off his men somewhat carelessly.

The Arsenal is now in full activity. The tall chimneys vomit dense clouds of black smoke; steam spurts up here and there; the sharp click of hammers falling upon metal can be heard on all sides; the men are beginning to roll the shells along the miniature railways laid along the ground for the purpose. All the gangs of prisoners are off, leaving a dense cloud of dust behind them. There are 299 in the Arsenal to-day, the deputy-governor informs us. This number is added, he says, to the ascertained number remaining on board the hulk; and then, if the whole tally with the number registered upon the governor's books, all is right.

We then turned our attention to the hulk once more, and re-entered the deputy- governor's gig. As we were jerked through the water by the regular strokes of the men, and the measured working of the rollicks, we noticed the heavy cranes planted along the quay - their wheels covered with small roofs like parasols, but bearing, nevertheless, some evidences of

exposure to the weather. “With one of those cranes," said the officer to us, "I have seen a single man lift a cannon on board a ship. They are worked by hydraulic pressure."

No sooner did we reach the gangway of the "DEFENCE" once more, than the principal warder on board cried, as he met the deputy-governor, " Two hundred and ninety-nine, sir!" alluding to the number of prisoners who had left the ship for labour in the Arsenal. "All right!" was the laconic reply.

The Library and School at the Hulks.

”Would you like to come and see the meat, sir?" we were asked by our attendant officer. "I have to go." The steward sees to the proper weight, while the deputy-governor examines the quality of the meat. The piece we saw was an enormous leg of beef, against which prodigious weights were necessary to ascertain its precise value. The prisoners left aboard the hulk were now busy washing the deck and the gangway. Some dashed buckets of water on the boards, while others were vigorously plying flat scrubbing-brushes, fixed at the extremity of long handles. Below, in a boat, alongside the hulk, were more brown prisoners, pumping at a small engine, and forcing the water, taken from the Artesian-well in the Arsenal, into the capacious tank of the hulk. There is, in fact, one continued splashing of liquid everywhere - on the decks, and in the long-boats, or cutters, which have now returned from the shore. The "DEFENCE," we may add, has twenty tanks, holding two tons each of water. We next adjourned to the governor's comfortable breakfast-room, with its pretty stern-windows, and its light blue and white walls. The military salute of the convict-servant who entered from time to time, with his white apron about his loins, was the only reminiscence of the hulk as we sat at the morning meal. After this we visited the chapel and school-room. The chapel is a square apartment.

After this we visited the chapel and school-room.

The prisoners who could "read and write" well, and those who were "well educated" on reception, have since made considerable advancement in arithmetic and the lower branches of mathematics.

Admirably arranged for its purpose, the part on the level with the top deck forming the galleries, to which the prisoners on that deck pass direct from their wards, while the body of the little church is even with the middle deck, and accommodates the rest of the prisoners. The pulpit is erected at the stern end of the chapel, between the two decks, and has a bright brass reading lamp to it; its cushions being covered with canvas. Four more lamps are suspended from the ceiling, the whole of the wood-work being painted to imitate oak. It is in the body of this chapel that the black, slanting desks, with inkstand holes (the very models of those which all boys remember with horror), are arranged for the daily school. At the side of the pulpit is the prison library. The selection of books is suggestive. Let us run over a few titles culled from the backs of the volumes - "Marcet's Conversations on Natural Philosophy," "Paley's works," "The Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties," Sturm's "Reflections on the Works of God," "Persian Stories," "Recreations in Physical Geography," "The Rites and Worship of the Jews," "The Penny London Reader," "First Sundays at Church," "Stories from the History of Rome," "Short Stories from the History of Spain," "Swiss Stories, " Scenes from English History," "Rodwell's First Steps to Scottish History," "Stories for Summer Days and

Winter Evenings," "Easy Lessons in Mechanics." There are in all 1099 volumes upon the shelves. In reply to our questions as to the books that are the most popular among the convicts, and the rules on which they were issued, we were informed that each prisoner had a right to have a book, and to keep it ten days. If he wanted it longer, he could generally renew the time. The books most in demand were Chambers' publications, and all kinds of histories and stories. Very few asked for Paley's "Moral Philosophy." "I think," continued our attendant warder, "that 'Chambers' Miscellany,' 'The Leisure Hour,' and 'Papers for the People,' are generally preferred beyond other publications. There is a great demand for them. We haven't got Dickens' 'Household Words,' or I dare say it would be in request. The chaplain objects to it being in the library." All friends of education have scouted the idea long since, of leading uneducated men to a love of books by such works as Paley's "Theology" or Sturm's "Reflections." These are now generally regarded as the unread books of Literary institutes - because difficult to understand, and in no way appealing to the minds of the great majority of readers. Let us, therefore, imagine a convict who has been rubbing the rust from cannon-balls all day long, with a copy of Paley for his hour's amusement before he turns in. If he reads he most probably will not understand. A distaste rather than a taste for reading is hereby engendered. Yet books teaching kindly lessons, in the homely accidents of life, and which all may read and comprehend, are hardly to be found upon the chaplain's library shelf. The school is divided into nine divisions. The first division, subdivided into sections A and B, musters 110 men. The second division musters 55 men, and so on. The divisions, as they attend the school, are generally so managed as to average 55 in number. Some convicts, we were told, cannot read, and no teaching will make them. The teaching includes reading, writing, and arithmetic, as far as "practice." In reply to our inquiry as to the interval that elapsed between the convicts school-days, we were informed that the turn to remain on board for lessons came round once in every nine or ten days. The prisoners told-off for school now appeared on the ground-floor of the chapel, at the black desks. They were well-washed and brushed, and wore blue and white neckerchiefs, and grey stockings barred with red stripes. The third division is in to-day. The school begins with two psalms and a prayer. "Now, attention for prayers!" is called out before they begin. Then the clerk reads a chapter of St Luke; next the schoolmaster cites a verse from a psalm, and the men go stammering after him. It is a melancholy sight. Some of the scholars are old bald-headed men, evidently agricultural labourers. There, amid sharp-featured men, are dogged-looking youths, whom it is pitiful to behold so far astray, and so young. And now the clerk who read the prayers may be seen teaching the men; but it is evidently hard work, and few, it is to be feared, care for the school, further than for the physical repose it secures them. We now passed to the little rooms off the wards, where a few prisoners were tailoring, while others were making the solid shoes such as the working gangs in the Arsenal wear. We then advanced to the cabins ranged along the sides of the weather-deck. In one a bookbinder was binding the rugged library volumes in black leather. "Take off your cap, sir !" cried our attendant to the prisoner, as we appeared, "and go on with your work!" Next we passed to the lamp-man's cabin, and found him trimming the night lamps for the wards. Then we reached the carpenter's shop; and there a grey-headed old prisoner who was planing a deal-board, turned a melancholy face towards us as we entered. Then we visited the linen-house, where two or three prisoners were arranging the linen of the various wards in little tight rolls. We inquired how often the

men had a change. "They change their linen every week, and their flannels every fortnight," was the reply. How gratifying to men who can remember the horrible filth in which, only a few years since, the hulk convicts were allowed to remain. There was not an idle man on board. Festoons of clothes were drying above our heads, swung from the two stunted masts; while across the main deck, lines of dark-brown string were being twisted by a convict rope-maker, to be turned to account for the hammocks that two other prisoners were mending in a little cabin hard by. Everywhere officers were standing over the men at their labours, each warder being provided with his book, in which he enters the men's industry, or want of energy. Their tone to the men was firm, but not hard or harsh; still they kept them to their task. Every prisoner we approached saluted us, military fashion, then stood still till the officer said, "Go on with your work, sir !-Go on with your work!" when the men turned to their labour again.

The Working Parties in the Arsenal

The governor now called his gig to the gangway to carry us ashore to inspect the labourers in the Arsenal. It was a smart little boat, and the rowers were trimly dressed in white, with the word "DEFENCE" printed round the legs of their trousers. The men, with their glazed hats and ruddy faces, looked unlike convicts. Their position is the reward of good conduct. They sit in a little deck-house close to the gangway, all day long, ready to be called out at any moment. The men volunteer for boat service. First, they are put into the water-boat, which conveys the well-water to and from the shore; from this service they are promoted to the provision cutter, which also takes off the subordinate officers; and then they reach a seat in the governor's gig. The men like this service, and are sent for misconduct - as when they use bad language - to labour on the public works. We started for the Arsenal once more, at a rapid pace; the governor himself steering the pretty gig with its white tiller ropes. On landing, after passing by the heavy cranes, we came up with the first gang of prisoners, who were loading a bark alongside the quay. "These are the sloops that convey war-stores to Sheerness," we were told. "And yonder black hull is a floating powder-magazine, near which no ship anchors. We remarked the absence of military sentries, and were told that they had been withdrawn from the convicts working in the Arsenal, although they still mounted guard. Then the place is pointed out to us where the "DEFENCE" once had a washing-house, which has been taken away by the government; together with a vegetable garden, where the convicts formerly cultivated vegetables for the hulk. "Now we wash on board the little 'SULPHUR' hulk," continued our informant, "and dry on board our own ship." We walked into the grounds of the Arsenal, and soon came up with a second party of prisoners at work digging out shot. As we approached, the officer in charge gave the governor a military salute, saying, "All right, sir - l0-8." The 10 being, as we have already noticed, the number of the gang, and 8 the strength of it. The governor, who knows what the strength of each gang is, can thus assure himself of the presence of all the men. We next turned into the stone-yard, the chosen ground of hard, dull, mechanical labour. Here there was a strong gang of men breaking granite. "All right! how many?" calls the governor. "All right, sir - 8-9," answers the officer in charge. Then, seeing a free workman at hand, the officer is told to keep him off. Here each man is doing task-work. Every convict must break so many bushels, according to the size to which he is required to reduce them, the size being measured by a wooden

machine, through which they are passed. Thus, a man breaking up the stones small, for a garden walk, must break two bushels daily, whereas a man breaking them up less, must fill four or six bushel measures.

We then passed on to huge stacks of valuable timber. "All this," said our companion, "has been piled by convict labour." Through fields of cannon lying in rows - here black as charcoal, there red with rust-past stacks of wheels and wheel less wagons, by sheds where the air was impregnated with turpentine from the freshly-worked timber, under heavy cranes, through mud, and sawdust, and shavings - here hailing a gang turning a wheel, and there a gang clearing rubbish - deep down a grove of conical heaps of rusty shells, where the men were filing and polishing them, we made our round of the convict working parties. All of them were busy. The officer takes care of that; for he is fined one shilling every time one of his men is caught idling, while the escape of one entails his dismissal. Suddenly we came upon a guard whose duty it was to go the round of the gangs and collect the men who wished to satisfy a call of nature. Then we came upon an angle of the Arsenal wall against the Plumstead high-road, where we saw an armed guard with his carbine, marching rapidly backward and forward. "Now I shall know directly whether all is right," said the governor, as he raised his hand. The sentinel instantly halted, presented arms, then raised his right hand. "Had there been an escape," continued the governor, "he would have grasped his carbine by the barrel, and held it aloft horizontally. That is the escape signal, and this man is stationed here because escape would be easy over the wall to the high road. Only the other day I caused a drain to be stopped up that led from the Arsenal to the marshes; for we once had a hunt, that lasted all day long, after two prisoners who got into that drain. We caught them at its mouth by the Plumstead road. It is exceedingly difficult to prevent attempts at escape, especially while there are so many free men in the Arsenal. Last year there were no less than 14,000 free labourers employed there, and these men taken on without reference to character. Here the attempts at escape, which prisoners had made from time to time, formed for some time the subject of our conversation. "The convicts," we were told, "were generally assisted by the free labourers," who deposited clothes for them in some convenient spot. The convict slipped for a moment from his gang, put the clothes on, and passed out of the Arsenal gates with the crowds of free men. Or else he made a dash for it, bolted past the sentinels, swam the canal, reached the marshes, and made off to the wood at hand. These attempts sometimes defied the utmost vigilance of the officers. It was the duty of a guard, from whose gang a man escaped, to hasten on board with the rest of his men (unless he can find an officer to undertake this duty while he runs after the lost man), and report the escape. We then signal to the police authorities by telegraph, to Bow Street, Erith, Guildford, Ilford, Bexley Heath, and Shooter's Hill, so as to surround him with a band of vigilant policemen, and prevent his getting clear. It was impossible to guard entirely against these attempts under this mixed system. They could not prevent the men from talking by night. But how much worse was it under the old system, when some six hundred or seven hundred prisoners were crammed into a hulk smaller than the "DEFENCE," and with only one officer all night to watch them. We inquired whether the men were very severely punished when they were lazy, and were answered in the affirmative. "They are sent here to labour," said the governor. "Here, officer, give me your labour-book." This book contained on one side a description of the nature and quantity of the work performed, and on the other the conduct

of the men during the work. We were assured, however, that the men have very seldom to be punished for idleness. "They do twice as much as free men," added the governor. "They work excellently." We now turned from the busy Arsenal, crossed the canal bridge, and approached the little black wooden lodge of the policeman who guards the gate leading to the marshes. He salutes us as we pass out to the marshes.

The scene, close by the gate, is singularly English. To the right lies the rising ground of Plumstead, with its red square church-tower peeping from among the dense green cluster of the trees. Below is a cluster of village houses, and beyond swells Abbey Wood up the shelving ground; while beyond this, again, and serving as background, rises Shooter's Hill, capped by two or three suburban villas. Right before us is a vast earth-work, all, as we are told, raised by convict labour! It is a 5-mortar battery. We approached it (crossing the range where the ordnance authorities try their rifles at the butt, while that solitary man, far over the marshes, comes out of the shed by the side of the mark, after every shot, and with a long pole marks the point hit) and found the prisoners, with their brown jackets thrown off, and some with their legs buried in water-boots, reaching to their thighs, digging the heavy, black, clayey soil, and carrying it away in barrows, under the eyes of two guards, with their cutlasses at their sides and two non-commissioned officers of the sappers and miners, who were directing the works. "That's a nice circular cut, sir," said one of the non-commissioned officers, pointing to the earth-work thrown up. The governor then challenged the guards, who told off their numbers, and gave the usual "All right !" The bright red shell-jackets, and. the caps with gay gold bands, stood out in painful contrast with the dingy crew of unfortunate men they were directing. As we looked on at the work going bravely forward, our attention was specially directed to the healthy appearance of the men. "See," said the governor, evidently not a little proud of their ruddy cheeks, "they are not ill-looking men. I have to punish them very seldom. One or two of the men in the stone-yard were old offenders, and they're the best behaved. There's a fine young chap there, stript to the buff, and working away hard!"

The Convicts' Burial Ground.

We turned away, and went farther over the marshes, the ground giving way under our feet; and presently we passed behind the butt, while the Minié balls were whistling through the air, and that solitary man was marking the hits. We approached a low piece of ground-in no way marked off from the rest of the marsh - in no way distinguishable from any section of the dreary expanse, save that the long rank grass had been turned, in one place lately, and that there was an upset barrow lying not far off. Heavy, leaden clouds were rolling over head, and some heavy drops of rain pattered upon our faces as we stood there. We thought it was one of the dreariest spots we had ever seen. "This," said the governor, "is the Convicts' Burial Ground!" We could just trace the rough outline of disturbed ground at our feet. Beyond this was a shed, where cattle found shelter in bad weather; and to the right the land shelved up between the marsh and the river. There was not even a number over the graves; the last, and it was only a month old, was disappearing. In a few months, the rank grass will have closed over it, as over the story of its inmate. And it is, perhaps, well to leave the names of the unfortunate men, whose bones lie in the clay of this dreary marsh, unregistered and unknown. But the feeling with which we look upon its desolation is irrepressible.

We followed the governor up the ridge that separates the marsh from the river, and walked on, back towards the Arsenal. As we walked along we were told, that under our feet dead men's hones lay closely packed; the ridge could no longer contain a body, and that was the reason why, during the last five or six years, the lower ground had been taken. Then there is a legend - an old, old legend, that has passed down to the present time - about a little pale-blue flower, with its purple leaves - the *"rubrum lamium"*- which, it is said, grows only over the convicts grave-a flower, tender and unobtrusive as the kindness for which the legend gives it credit. Botanists, however, will of course ruthlessly destroy the local faith that has given this flower value; for they will tell you it is only a stunted form of the "red dead nettle."We pass from the graves, meet a perambulating guard, who signals "All right!" by saluting and raising his hand-and then, recrossing the canal-bridge, where the convicts are stacking wood, and the click and ring of bricklayers' trowels are heard, relieved now and then by the reports of hit ordnance rifle-practice, *we* make our way towards the boat saluted by the "All rights" and salutes of the officers of other working parties that we pass by the way. There are many objects to arrest our attention, as we go, from the exploded wrecks of barrels, &c., lying for sale near the butt bank, where men are digging shot out of the ground. We meet another patrolling guard, who gives the "All right" salute; and whose duty it is, as soon as he hears of an escape, to dash through the enclosure about the arsenal, and, waving his carbine horizontally in the air, communicate the fact to the sentries in the marshes.

THE CONVICT'S FLOWER.

The Convicts flower.

Our way lies then by the rocket-sheds, rather celebrated for accidents. "Occasionally you see the men at work there," said the governor, "rush out with their clothes all in flames, and dive into the canal. Only a month or so ago, two or three sheds blew up, and the rockets were flying about all amongst my men." As we passed, a workman, black as gunpowder, appeared at the door of one of the sheds with a sieve. Close at hand to the rocket-sheds, were little powder boats, like miniature Lord Mayor's barges, with the windows blocked up and the gilding taken off. "There are the cartridge-sheds, too; and there the fire-engines are always kept at the water's edge, in case of accident, and with the hose ready in the water, as you see. All right, Mr Watson?" "All right, sir! No. 3-10" Here, opposite the gang of convicts just hailed, and who were hard at work stacking planks, were some few idlers upon the top of a barge. Contrast the conduct of those fellows with my men, was the governor's observation. "Their language is dreadful, as you can hear. You see, too, that new building, with the tall, minaret chimneys, flanked by low stacks, and with crimson tongues of flame at top - that's a shell factory." There are shoots of white steam, and plumes of black smoke issuing from it; and as we advance past endless stacks of heavy timber arranged by the convicts, we hear the rattle of machinery and the noise of wheels. Then as we go by the large new building where mortars are to be cast, the governor approaches a gang, and asks again,"All right, Mr Jenning?" "All right, sir! 10-10," replies the officer.

We now pass through sheds - large as railway stations-under which numerous piles of

timber are stacked, together with endless rows of wheel less carts, with their wheels stacked opposite, and here we find the prisoners beginning to march in gangs towards the parade-ground. "It is half-past eleven o'clock, and they must be on board the hulk to dinner at noon precisely," says the governor to us. As we draw nearer and nearer to the parade-ground, we can see them filing along from different directions. There is no confusion on reaching the spot, for each man knows his exact place. Then a strict search of the men is made by the warders, to see that they have not secreted anything while at work - the men opening their waistcoats, and pulling off their cravats, as before, to facilitate the operation. The searching over, the men descend the stairs, in parties, to the cutters, and return to the hulk in the order in which they left her in the morning. Having made the tour of the Arsenal (which, including the section of the marshes turned to use, measures 150 square acres in extent), we also returned on board the hulk with the governor. "Weigh all!" is the word of command. And in a few minutes we are at the "DEFENCE" gangway. The officers are hurrying the convicts on board. "Now, Mr B--, bring your men up!" A long-boat approaches, crammed with men and warders. "Hoist your oars!" cries an officer as the cutter touches the hulk. The warders land first, and then they hurry the men up the gangway steps. As soon as they reach the deck they advance, in single file, to their respective hatchways, and descend at once to their wards. The tread of these two hundred men sounds below almost like thunder rolling under the decks! They are at once locked up in their wards, where their tin mug and plate are turned upside down, one upon the other, around each mess-table, previous to dinner.

The Convicts at Dinner and Leaving for Work.

Now men appear at the end of the wards with large clothes-baskets full of bread. "3-7; 4-8; and 5-8!" cries the warder, as he dispenses the loaves to each mess. The mess-men of these parties advance to the gate of the ward, and receive their proper quantities for their respective messes. Some messes have a loaf and a quarter, others two whole loaves, according to their numerical strength - the men dividing these quantities themselves. There is also upon the mess-tables, a deal-board to cut up the meat upon. A man now comes below carrying knife-bags, and distributes them according to the number of men in each compartment. After dinner they are cleaned, put back into the bags, and returned to the proper officer. The men who have been on board all day were in their wards, pacing to and fro, before their companions came pouring down from their Arsenal work. "To your table, men!" cries the chief warder; and accordingly the men range themselves in their proper seats. "Now A ward!" is shouted down the hatchway. "Come on here - one, two, and three!" A man from each mess answers the call. Presently, these messmen are seen returning, each carrying a small tub full of meat, and a net full of potatoes, together with the supper bread. One man at each mess may now be seen serving out the potatoes into tin plates. Then there is a cry of- "All up!" The men rise, and grace is said. When the men are re-seated, a man proceeds at once to cut up the meat upon the mess-board. The dinner is now portioned out, and we are informed that the men very rarely quarrel over the division of the allowed quantities. When the meat is cut into eight or nine portions, as the case may be, the meat-board is pushed into the middle of the table, and each man takes the piece nearest to him. Then the peeling of potatoes goes actively forward, and the men are soon fairly engaged upon their meal, talking the while in a low, rumbling tone. "Not too much talking there! Silence-silence here! " cries

the warder. Since the morning, the top deck and the others have undergone a complete change. The windows have been removed, and the atmosphere is fresh and pleasant. The governor now went his rounds, and was saluted on all sides. At length one o'clock sounded. At five minutes past we saw the guard go down the gangway with fixed bayonets, followed by one of the principal warders."Now, then, turn the hands out, Mr. Webb, and man the gig!" was shouted. In a few minutes the convicts began to stream up the deck from the hatchways, and to move down the gangway in single file, to the cutters, as in the morning. "Oars up, here! Oars up!" shouts the guard in the cutter to the rowers, as the first prisoners reach the water's edge. The boat carrying the guards - their bayonets sparkling in the sun - and some officers too, is already off to receive the men on shore. In a few minutes the two hundred men are on their way to the parade-ground; while on board the officers are occupied in mustering the "boarders" and schoolmen. Once more we push off in the governor's gig, as the sharp crack of the rifles in the marshes reminds us that the ordnance men are still practising at the butt. During the men's absence in the afternoon, the boarders carry the hammocks back from the houses ; and while we were watching this operation, our informant related to us the story of a convict who, being employed in the chaplain's room, managed to cut his black gown, and manufacture it into a pair of black trousers. With only this garment upon him, he contrived, one very dark and gusty night, to drop overboard. He swam clear off, and reached a swamp, where he got entangled in a bed of rushes. Here he got frightened, and cried for help. Some men in a barge, who were passing, picked him up, and suspecting that he was a convict, delivered him up to the prison officers.

The convicts leave their afternoon's work at a quarter-past five, so as to be all collected by half-past, and before the free men leave. It was a pretty sight to see them re-embark for the night; for the slanting rays of the sun threw long shadows from the cutters over the water, and the evening light sparkled warmly upon the tide, and danced as it caught every polished point of the dense mass, while the boats advanced towards the hulk. As we watched the cutters approach, we inquired into the regulations concerning the receiving visits and letters from their friends by the convicts. In reply we were told that they see their relatives once in three months, and that they are allowed to write every three months. These meetings of the prisoners with their friends are held under the poop - three meetings taking place at a time. There are, however, no regular days for visits; if a friend calls while a man is away at labour, the authorities send for him. The regulations, we should add, appear to be carried out with great consideration.

On the cutters reaching the hulk, the prisoners stream up the gangway in single file as before - then pour down the hatchways, into their respective wards, where gruel is at once served out to them, and they are allowed to rest till chapel-time, at half-past six o'clock. After chapel, at eight o'clock, the men are mustered in their wards and the gates of the wards locked for the night. When the officer cries, "The musters over!" the men jump up, the tables disappear, the forms are ranged along the sides of the ward, and each man gets his hammock from the corner in which they were piled in the afternoon by the boarders. In a few minutes all the hammocks are slung, and the men talking together. "The 44 division is for school to-morrow," cries an officer. Shortly after this each man is beside his hammock, preparing for bed, and then they are allowed to talk until nine o'clock; but directly the clock strikes, not

another word is heard. At nine o'clock the two officers to each deck are relieved by the night officer, and the men are in bed. There are also four guards who relieve one another through the night, at the gangway. At nine o'clock the countersign is given out by the governor to the chief warder, the chief warder giving it to the officers on the watch, so that after this hour nobody can move about the ship without it.

All is quiet. We hear once more the gurgling of the water about the hulk. Over towards the Arsenal, the warm red lights of the little white pier stand out prettily against the dark shore, and there are bright lights shining over the crumpled water, in little golden paths. The shore, too, is studded with lights as with jewels. We are informed that the countersign for the night is "Smyrna." Then we hear the loud metallic ring of two bells. "Nine o'clock!" cries the warder. Now there is not a sound heard below, but the occasional tramp of footsteps over-head. The men, as they lie in their hammocks, look like huge cocoons. The principal warder tries all the locks of the wards, and at ten o'clock the hatches are padlocked for the night, and the day's duties are ended.

The "Unité" Hospital Ship.

While the men were performing their afternoon labours in the Arsenal, we found time to go, in the captain's gig, on board the convicts' hospital ship, the "UNITÉ"- or "Uneet," according to the local pronunciation. The "UNITÉ" hospital ship, moored to the "DEFENCE", is an old 36-gun frigate, taken from the French. The officer who steered us on board bade us examine the beauty of her build. This ship is excellently arranged and has large airy decks, along which iron bedsteads are placed, at sufficient distances, for the reception of the sick men from the "DEFENCE" and "WARRIOR" labour hulks. The vessel is cleaned by a few healthy convicts; while some of the convalescents, in their blue-grey dresses and odd comical night-caps, are employed as nurses. The top deck is a fine spacious room, covered with matting, and lighted by wide, barred port-holes. The invalid bedsteads were ranged on either side of the deck from one end to the other, and at the head of them there were small places for books. "Here the temperature in the winter months," said the master, "is kept up to sixty. "We passed one man in bed, who was coughing. It was a case of phthisis. He had chloride of lime hanging all round him, to destroy the odour of the expectoration. Then there was another poor fellow, with his head lying upon a pillow, placed upon a chair at the side of the bed, who had a disease of the heart, and had been spitting blood. The convalescents, in their queer, blue-gray gowns, draw up at the end of their beds as we move along, and salute us. Another man lies in bed, wearing a night-cap, marked "Hospital;" he has a broken leg. Another, of whom we asked the nature of his illness, replied, "Asthmatical, sir! "Two healthy prisoners are employed on each deck," said the master, "to act as nurses. One of the convalescents acts as barber. That's he, with his belt round his waist filled with sheaths and razors." Then we visited the place where the convalescents assemble for prayers, morning and evening. "We have twenty-four in hospital to-day," the master added; "five were discharged this morning. There is plenty of ventilation, you perceive. A perfect draught is kept up, by means of tubes, right through the ship. We were told that a Bible and Testament were placed at the head of each bed; and we saw one convict reading "Recreations in Astronomy." We inquired about the scale of diet. In reply the master said, "The man so bad, up-stairs, has 2 eggs, 2 pints of arrowroot and milk, 12 ounces of bread, 1 ounce of butter, 6

ounces of wine, 1 ounce of brandy, 2 oranges, and a sago pudding daily. Another man here is on half a sheep's head, 1 pint of arrowroot and milk, 4 ounces of bread, 1 ounce of butter, 1 pint extra of tea, and 2 ounces of wine daily. Here is the scale of full diet for convalescents:

BREAKFAST 4 ounces of bread¼ pint of milk. 2 ounces of oatmeal gruel.

SUPPER 4 ounces of bread. One-sixth of an ounce of tea. ½ ounce of sugar. ¼ pint of milk.

DINNER 8 ounces of bread. 8 ounces of mutton (uncooked). 1 pound of potatoes. ½ ounce of salt. ½ pint of porter. 1 pint of soup.

The healthy men employed on board the "UNITÉ" muster twenty strong, including the boatmen, cooks, and washermen. There are nine warders, an infirmary warder, and principal. The night-watches begin at half-past five, at which hour half the officers leave the ship, and return at seven o'clock on the following morning. The principal, however, lives on board, and there is also a resident surgeon.

From the directors' report in 1854, we learn that there were on board, on the 1st of January in that year, 58 patients; that in the course of that year 675 patients were admitted; that in the course of the same year 658 patients were discharged; that two patients were pardoned on medical grounds; that 25 died; that two patients were invalided to the " Stirling Castle;" and that on the 31st of December, 1854, there were 36 patients left in the hospital.

The "Sulphur" Washing Hulk.

From the "UNITE" we proceeded, in the gig of the governor of the "DEFENCE", past old steamers, low wharves, flaunting little river-side public-houses, towards the great bulging hulk of the "WARRIOR". But before being landed at the dockyard steps, to go on board the model hulk, we pulled aside to a little, low, dingy ship, which serves as a floating wash-tub to the Woolwich hulks. This old sloop of war, once carrying thirty guns, has now fifteen convicts on board, under the orders of a master, whose business it is to wash the clothes of the men in the "WARRIOR" and "DEFENCE" hulks. There are three washermen, one blacksmith, and two stocking-menders here employed. On deck there was a solitary soldier keeping guard. The maindeck was very wet. Forward, there were large square black water-tanks, and beside these a corrugated iron blacksmith's shop, with an old convict filing away inside. Bundles of convicts' stockings lie waiting to be mended near the poop, while lines, ornamented with linen, dangle over-head. Below, between the low decks, we groped our way, in the deep gloom, amid damp clothes-past men mending stockings, others folding convict clothes, and tying them up into rolls ready to ho worn-in the steam and smell of clothes drying by heat, past capacious vats and boilers. The warder in charge of the old sloop showed us over his dingy kingdom with great courtesy, and answered our many questions with excellent good-humour. He told us that all the convicts employed with him throughout the day slept on board the "WARRIOR" opposite. He alone remained on board all night. We pushed off from the "SULPHUR", thanking the warder for his courtesy, and pulled for the dockyard steps alongside the "WARRIOR."

The "Warrior" Hulk.

This great hulk, an old 74-gun ship, upwards of sixty years of age, which has been the subject of annual remonstrances from the prison directors to the government for some time past and

the ribs of which, it is said, hardly hold together, is moored alongside the dockyard, with her head towards London, and serves to house the convicts who work in the dockyard. We have so fully described the hulk system on board the "DEFENCE," which differs in no important particular from that pursued on board the "WARRIOR", that it will be unnecessary to do more than glance at the general arrangements of this ship. Even the employment of the prisoners in the dockyard differs little in character from that performed by the convicts who work in the Arsenal. The distribution of the prisoners' time closely resembles that on board the "DEFENCE," there being 2 hours given to meals; 9 hours and 5 minutes to work; and 4 hours and 25 minutes to in-door occupation throughout the summer; while in the winter the meals occupy 2 hours and 5 minutes; work, 7 hours and 55 minutes; and the in-door occupation, *5* hours.

The "WARRIOR" is reached, from the dockyard, by a gallery projecting from the quay to the gangway. At the end of the compartment under the forecastle is a large iron palisading, with two gates, which are securely padlocked at night. "The ship," our attendant-warder informs us, "is lighted by gas - the only one in the world, perhaps, that is so." This is owing to the close contiguity of the vessel to the shore. The top deck has a fine long wide passage. The wards are divided into two messes, and contain two tables each. The other arrangements are the same as in the "DEFENCE". Here, however, each ward has its little library; and every man has a Bible, a prayer-book, a hymn-book, and a library-book; the last he gets from the schoolmaster. Each ward, too, has a solid bulkhead, which prevent the authorities having too large a body of prisoners together. There is a gas-light at the bulkhead between each ward, so arranged as to light two wards at once, while the passage is darkened, so that the officer on duty can see the men, while they cannot see him. The middle deck is very fine and spacious, the passage being about five feet in width. There are eight wards on the top deck, ten in the middle deck, and fourteen on the lower deck.

The ship can accommodate four hundred and fifty men. There are now four hundred and forty-nine men in her, and out of this number only ten in the hospital. At the head end of the middle deck is a shoemaker's shop, where we found the convicts mending prisoners' shoes; while opposite them is the tailor's shop, and here the workers were repairing shirts and flannels. The lower deck is also a fine long deck, reaching right from the head to the stern. There is a current of air right through it. It is, however, very low. At the fore-part of this deck, on one side, is the carpenter's shop; while the seven refractory cells occupy the opposite side. A black label hangs at each door of the dark cells, and upon this is chalked the name and punishment of the inmate. One runs thus:- "In for 4 days; B and W (bread and water); in 19th, out 23rd. The next man is in for seven days, with bread and water, for having attempted to escape; and a third prisoner is also in for seven days, for extreme insolence to the governor and warders. We now passed on to the chapel, the surgery, &c., and entered the schoolmaster's cabin, where we saw the same class of books as we noted down on board the "DEFENCE". The school classes are divided into eleven divisions, arranged according to the ability of the men. All the men have half a day's schooling each per week. All take three lessons, viz., one hour's reading, one hour's writing, and one hour's arithmetic. Here we found some trying in vain to write, while one was engaged upon a letter beginning, "Dear brother." The copies the men were making were generally better than one could expect.*

**Those who could "read and write well" when received, or were "well educated" have since made considerable progress in arithmetic and other subjects.

We noticed also the chapel clerks, who were convicts with silver-grey hair, and appeared to belong to a better class. They write letters or petitions, we were told, for the prisoners who are unable to do so themselves. One of these clerks had been a medical man, in practice for himself during twenty-five years, while the other had been a clerk in the Post-office. The clerk had been transported for fourteen years; and the medical man had been sentenced to four years' penal servitude.

The working parties here are arranged as in the Arsenal, only the strongest men are selected for the coal-gang, invalids being put to stone-breaking. In the dockyard there are still military sentries attached to each gang of prisoners. We glanced at the parties working, amid the confusion of the dockyard, carrying coals, near the gigantic ribs of a skeleton ship, stacking timber, or drawing carts, like beasts of burden. Now we came upon a labouring party, near a freshly pitched gun-boat, deserted by the free labourers, who had struck for wages, and saw the well-known prison brown of the men carrying timber from the saw-mills. Here the officer called - as at the Arsenal - "All right, sir! 27-10." Then there were parties testing chain cables, amid the most deafening hammering. It is hard, very hard, labour the men are performing.

The Neve, Picton & Rogers Families

Freda Gibson (Nee Rogers)

My father and mother's family were born in the Plumstead area; I myself was born in Woolwich. My father's family always worked at the Woolwich Arsenal. My dad had 46 years service when he died just before retirement at 60 years. He was in charge of the Proving yard and worked in the Danger Building.

Two photos of George Rogers, my paternal grandfather.

My grandfather, George Rogers, lived at No 3 Speranza Street, Plumstead, next door to Plumstead Police Station. My father, Frederick Rogers, was born there in 1906. My sister and I went in May for a nostalgic trip to there and both sets of grandparents houses were there. Granddad used to lift us up to look over the wall at the police dogs in the police station's yard.

The Neve family. The formidable old lady in the photo was My Great grandma Maria, and the rest were my uncle Fred's family, outside Bath Road Plumstead, celebrating the 1918 Armistice.

Uncle Fred Neve and family.

My mother, Jessie, was born in Charlton. Her father, my granddad Neve, worked at Siemens as a General Foreman Engineer; she had nine siblings, all her family worked at Siemens. The Neve family were on my mother's side, they originally came from Necton, in Norfolk. My grandfather was born in Woolwich in 1878 and died in 1938. Unfortunately, I didn't know them very well as our family was evacuated to Staffordshire in 1941.

In September 1940 there was a massive raid on the Woolwich Arsenal and the surrounding towns, it was decided that all the key personnel should be evacuated, along with their families, to Staffordshire. Houses were built to accommodate them, it is still known in Stone (the nearest town) as the 'Ministry Estate'. Late in 1949 it was decided dad was needed back at the Arsenal, so we moved back to Sidcup.

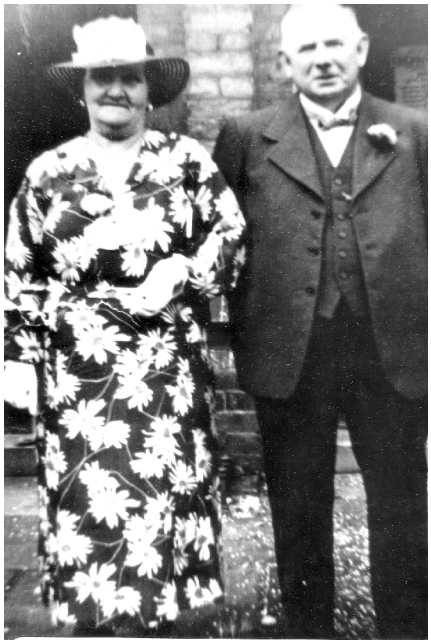
My mother Jessie with myself and my sister Evelyn, taken about 1939 at a photographers in Woolwich.

Both my sister and I were born in the Woolwich Mothers Home. I am now trying to trace graveyards for the Picton's family, which was my grandmother's maiden name. They lived in Woolwich; quite a few of them emigrated to Canada in the early 1900's (originally from Pembroke Wales). I believe that they were buried in churchyards, not cemeteries. My mother's maiden name was Neve and they lived at 29 Riverdale Road.

The Picton's, which were on my maternal grandmother's side, that I did not know about until I received a 57 paged family history from Brian Picton Swann in Canada. The only thing I knew was that they were originally from Haverford west Wales and worked in the coal mining industry and moved to Woolwich to work in the docks.

The other family, the Hurst's, who were my paternal great grandparents were Army people, who ended up living in Woolwich, as William, my great grandfather, was in the Royal Artillery, but in the 1901 census, his occupation was boilermaker, so would assume that he had retired from the Army.

My mum and dad getting married at St Nicholas Church, Plumstead, on 28th June 1928.



Gran and granddad Neve.

My sister and I also visited the old Woolwich Arsenal site, which had museums, but also now is an estate of luxury flats, each mostly costing around 1.3 million pounds.

(2009

The Night Before Christmas

Brian Willoughby

It was the night before Christmas and the snow was 'deep and crisp and even'..... In the early hours of Christmas Day, Friday 25th December 1942, my (maternal) grandfather was despatched to walk the three miles to Shooter's Hill to fetch the midwife and at 9.00 am I entered a world which was still very much at war but on this day all thankfully was quiet.

I was born at home in my grandparent's house at No 3 Ordnance Road, just off Woolwich Common and within easy range of two local pubs, The Ordnance Arms and The Perseverance, where my grandmother spent much of her time. Some years later she was to be thrown out of the latter for stealing the Christmas Club money and it was only the intervention of my parents who repaid the money to keep her out of prison.

Soon after giving birth, my mother returned to work at Dolcis Shoes in Woolwich, and I was to be left in the care of my grandparents. Early recollections of the house, which was built on three floors and a basement, were not altogether happy, but the saving grace was my grandfather Charlie Cook, who was a real gentleman. Charles Richard Cook had served with distinction with the 38th Brigade Royal Field Artillery with the British Expeditionary Force in 1914 and was among the first wave to go 'over the top' between August-November when massive amounts of allied lives were lost. Sergeant Charles Cook served ten years in the army before being discharged in November 1917 on medical grounds, just a week before the Armistice was signed.

The house in Ordnance Road was not owned by my grandparents, the 'landlord' was in fact a relative of my grandmother, which would explain the frequent comings and goings of a number of lodgers, which at the time I found difficult to understand. We lived in the ground floor and basement and even today I can still hear the 'pop' of the gas mantle being lit to provide a shadowy light through the dark hours of the night. Moving from one room to another required a candle and when the embers of the coal fire died down, the long winter nights became very dark, very cold, and very unwelcoming. The living room or 'parlour' was below ground and consequently it was always dark. On the outside wall there was a window which looked on to a so called 'area' and above that was the street, so the amount of natural light was watery at the best of times. In the corner of the room there was a cupboard door which led to the coal cellar and when the coalman used to shoot half a ton of coal, delivered in hundredweight sacks, through the hole in the pavement above, the coal dust whooshed under the cupboard door leaving a film of coal dust everywhere. The house had no bathroom or inside toilet facilities and typical of the day, infrequent bathing was carried out using jugs of hot water poured into a tin bath in front of the fire in the living room.

At a very early age, I was shipped off to the nursery on Woolwich Common where I was both taken and collected by my grandfather who would prove to be very influential in my formative years. We often rode the tram to Woolwich and spent a couple of hours travelling backwards and forwards on the Woolwich Free Ferry which is still in operation and still 'free' to this day. Afterwards we would walk back across Beresford Square to 'Manze's Eel and Pie shop and tuck into a plate of jellied eels. Alas, my maternal grandfather was not

great on sport, so I had to find my own way to 'The Valley' to watch Charlton Athletic and everybody's hero, goalkeeper Sam Bartram. In those days, small boys would pile in through the gates with the men and they would be lifted head high and passed through many pairs of hands to the front of the crowd for a better view. Gates of sixty thousand were not uncommon for a first division match at the Valley and just after the war, crowd violence had still not been invented!

The Willoughby's spiritual home was Plumstead Common, especially the bottom half of Timbercroft Lane close to the 'Who'd a Thought it' pub. My grandparents lived at No 38 and next to them several houses had been bombed, leaving some spare land to build on and when the government embarked on the 'prefab' scheme, to provide what was meant to be temporary accommodation for families needing to be re-housed after the war, they built a little village of prefabs on Winn's Common, plus a further two flat roofed prefabs at No 40 and 42 Timbercroft Lane.

My father's elder sister Jean and her husband Charlie Gray, were allocated No 40 but were 'gazumped' at the final hurdle by my parents who were given the accommodation because they had a child. Whilst this is probably very fair, I guess it put some pressure on family relationships for some time?

We moved into the prefab in 1946 and what a change this was. Electricity, hot and cold running water and a real bathroom and toilet....inside the house as well. Within a short time we even had a television set and whilst it might only have been a 9" black and white screen, this was to be a real technological advancement! I remember the first programme I ever saw was an ice hockey match and whilst I hadn't got a clue what it was all about, I was mesmerised by the fact that here were moving pictures in our own front room.

Whilst my first years had been spent with my maternal grandparents, the next few years I was to be under the watchful eye of someone who was considered a legend in local circles and the next four years were happy ones, full of exciting times, although the first Christmas was to say the least, eventful. As Christmas is my birthday and without my knowledge, it was decided that the entire Willoughby family (still close in those days) would come to us for tea. My parents in their wisdom put me to bed for a couple of hours in the afternoon and my first recollection of anything untoward was of being woken up in the twilight of the afternoon and being lifted into the living room when suddenly the lights went on and everybody started singing 'happy birthday to you.....' Startled wasn't the word for it....I lashed out with my feet, catching the underside of a plate of pink blancmange sitting on the table. I watched in fascination as it launched, almost in slow motion towards the ceiling before crashing back amongst the plates of food and Christmas goodies and obviously spoiling everybody's day. What a mess! Almost as suddenly, I was flying through the air myself, with my Father's arm locked around my waist, and seconds later I was alone again.....back in my bed and that was the end of Christmas for me!

John (Jack) Willoughby was different to Charlie Cook in so many ways and whilst I was still very young it was clear to me that my mother and father were always going to be 'absentee' parents because work always came first, so I quickly learned to be fiercely independent and accept that 'If it was to be, it was up to me!' Unlike mild mannered Charlie Cook, Jack

Willoughby was a fighter and a 'chancer' on all fronts and I relished spending time with him and listening to the many stories of his life.

Born John Charles Willoughby in Chatham on 6th February 1883, the third child of George Henry Magee Willoughby and Jane Alice Maude Reid, life was always going to be tough for this relatively poor family. Jack probably left school at eleven or twelve years old and the story goes that he often ran away from home because his father used to beat him. He became a hard living, hard drinking, hard fighting man and under the name of 'Tiger' he regularly fought in bare knuckled fights for a purse. Even after meeting and marrying my grandmother, Ethel Ouzman, she used to tell stories of how they would go to the pub on a Saturday night and he would stand on a table and challenge 'all comers' for money.

He joined the Royal Garrison Artillery on 3rd October 1902 on a short service engagement and during this time he spent two years serving in Malta. After discharge he remained on the Army Reserve and rejoined in August 1914 but was medically discharged in October 1915.

Jack married Ethel in 1906 in Camberwell and they lived in various cheap 'digs' whilst he struggled to find work, especially after their first child John was born in 1907. More children came along at regular two year intervals until the final surviving total of eight, four boys, four girls, was reached. Margaret (Peg) was the last to be born in 1922.

Jack and Ethel finally moved to 38 Timbercroft Lane around 1910 and it is amazing that eight children were reared in this very small 'two up and two down' house, especially as Jack converted the front room into a greengrocers shop! As he became more financially secure, he bought several houses in Timbercroft Lane (for cash!) and several of the children were farmed out to sleep, although family meals were always at 'at home'

Some of the stories of this extraordinary man have stood the test of time. It has always been alleged that he drank a gallon of ale before breakfast and many of the stories whilst 'under the influence' are funny; he must have been something of a handful for my grandmother. At the back of the house they had a small yard where he kept chickens, rabbits and a shed where he kept grain and feedstuffs. In an attempt to provide milk for the children, he 'swapped' a horse for a goat, which was fine in principle but the problem was that the washing line also hung out in the yard and when the goat took a fancy to chewing on the weekly wash, it had to go. After several pints in The Woodman Jack had another bright idea.....and later that day he returned home with a cow! This story is even funnier because the only way to the yard was through the front door and, quite naturally, this was the last straw for my grandmother. "But what am I going to do with it?" asked Jack. "I don't care if you throw it in the river. If the cow stays, I'm off!" With her words ringing in his ears, Jack walked off with the cow in tow behind him.

Some hours later there was a knock on the front door. "Does Jack Willoughby live here?" asked the policeman. "Yes he does." Replied my grandmother. "Why, What's happened?" The policeman lifted up a very wet Jack Willoughby and said, "We fished him out of the River Thames tied to a cow. Apparently you told him to do it but he forgot to untie the rope and when the poor creature went in, your husband went in as well."

I believe he gave up drinking shortly after that.....!

But then he started making 'home brew'.....Nothing sophisticated, this stuff was raw rocket fuel. He simply loaded oranges that had been left over from the shop into a huge stone vat, added water and yeast and left it to ferment for seven years with just the occasional stir every year or so. I saw many people get blind drunk after nothing more than a glass or two but the interesting thing was, the old chap never touched the stuff himself!

Jack Willoughby (my grandfather) was something of a legend in the area many years ago. This picture is of him in Albatross Street with his horse drawn delivery coal wagon that was taken circa 1934.

As a boy, I used to love going out with him on the coal round. Before my time he used a horse and cart and at one stage he had a magnificent cart pulled by two shire horses called Punch and Judy, but post war he converted to a lorry and whilst he never had a driving lesson or took a driving test travelling along the roads of South London with him was always an experience to savour.

At the end of the day, we used to get back home and empty our pockets onto the dining table. Everything in those days was cash and there was a lot of it! My job was to count it, getting high on the lovely smell of coal permeating every note, and make up bundles of notes tied up with pieces of string. There were blue one pound notes, brown ten shilling notes and lots of the large white Bank of England five pound notes. Jack never believed in banks so the money was mysteriously hidden away and even my grandmother knew nothing of their whereabouts or what or how much he had.

Many years later, and long after the old white five pound notes had been taken out of circulation, Jack mentioned to my father and me that there might be 'a few of the old fiver's lying around in one of the outhouses. We went into the store where the grain was kept and dipped our hands into one of the vats, pulling out bundles and bundles of them. The more we searched the

more we found. I lost track of how much was involved, but it took a letter to the then Governor of the Bank of England to agree to exchange them, which he did, into new notes

Two or three of his sons and daughters were quite musical, like many families of that bygone generation, and whilst Jack wasn't particularly musical himself, he loved to sing and he did teach himself to play the accordion when he was about seventy years old and looking back he made a fair job of it and to this day I can still hear him singing his favourite song;

"If you ever go across the sea to Ireland,

It may be at the dawning of the day,

You will sit and watch the moon rise over Claddagh,

And watch the sun go down on Galway Bay.....".

Until recently, I never knew the significance of why he had chosen this song but searching back through the generations it seems that Jack's grandparents were perhaps among the many thousands who escaped from Ireland during the Potato Famine of the mid 1800's and whilst some settled in England, many travelled further west to Canada and to the United States of America.

Granddad Jack Willoughby died in 1973, aged almost ninety, a great age for somebody that lived such a hard life. In later years he spent his days tending his beloved allotment across the road where, almost a century before, his family had lived in very meagre accommodation. He was indeed a free spirit but he always provided very well for his family and to the end he had a wide circle of friends.

Timbercroft School And Life In The 1940's

Trevor Duncombe

I started my school life at Timbercroft Lane School at the ripe old age of four in the year 1941 - a mere 67 years ago. This was during the second World War and at a time when air-raids were common place. We lived in Raymere Gardens and very early in the War, during a period referred to as the Blitz, a land mine fell in Alabama Street right behind our house. Fortunately we were safely ensconced in our Anderson shelter. For the rest of the war all those houses that weren't flattened by the land mine remained deserted, just empty shells. But they made excellent play areas for us kids. In today's world such buildings would have been cordoned off for safety reasons, but that wasn't the case in those days.

In those days school started at 9 am. Everybody walked to school, some accompanied by their mothers, others on their own. There was no option but to walk, hardly any families had a car and of those very few who did, were not able to use them as petrol was so scarce. I didn't get to go in a car until I was eleven years old. Buses did not run between Plumstead and Welling in those days. The nearest bus service to Timbercroft Lane was the No 54 which started outside the Woodman Public House and went to Croydon. There was also a No 53 and a No 53a from Plumstead Common. Because of the lack of cars, all of the children could walk safely to school. In those days, just prior to 9 o,clock, the school bell would ring which meant that we would all have to hurry along. The bell was located on top of the roof of the school and I imagine that the job of ringing it was that of the school caretaker, whose name was Mr Churchill and who had two sons who were pupils at the school.

On one occasion during my walk to school, the air raid siren went off and I had to run back home. However, before I got back home a V2 rocket fell on Duncroft. There were many fatalities in this instance, including children from Timbercroft School. The blast was felt at our house and all of the windows were blown in. When I reached home I went up to my father's bedroom as I knew that he was sleeping following night work in the Arsenal. The blast hadn't woken him despite the fact that his bed was covered in glass. If any child was hurt in an air raid and came to school with a bandage on we would all be jealous. Some times we would even put bandages on to make it look as if we had been hurt. The reason that I mention this is that the dangers of the war never really occurred to us as we had never known anything different, and really it was quite exciting. The term "counselling" just didn't exist then.

Once at school and prior to assembly all of the children would gather in the playground, and I recall that during the war years there were a number of 'Green Goddess' fire engines parked in the lower part of the playground. The playground was in two distinct sections, divided by a wooden fence and a big tree in the far corner. One section being the domain of the primary school and the other being the area for the juniors.

During break times, us boys would play mainly at football, using a tennis ball. At other times we would play a game called "British Bulldog" and another game called "Hijimanaka". Once a year, when the annual boat race between Oxford and Cambridge took place the boys would take sides between Oxford and Cambridge and play a football game in the playground on a grand scale. In today's world the boat race goes virtually unnoticed, but in

those days it was a big thing with much fierce rivalry, hence the football game in the playground.

In each of the playground areas were Boys and Girls toilets. These toilets were completely unprotected from the elements and I can assure you were freezing cold in the winter!

At lunchtime, school dinners were provided at the Slade School. This school had been taken over as a school for children with special needs but also had a kitchen and dining area. The meals that were served, by today's standards, were absolutely atrocious. It was always impressed upon us that food, because of its scarcity, should never be wasted. In order to enforce this doctrine, a teacher would parade up and down to ensure that all plates were cleared. I find it hard to describe the meat which was served, it was almost entirely fat and just the sight of it could make one vomit. Those of us who were smart made sure that we got a window seat and when the teacher wasn't looking we would propel the inedible food through the window !!

To supplement the school meals we were also provided with milk in 1/3 of a pint bottles at our morning break. The milk could also be fairly unpalatable on occasions. It was at its worse on hot summer days when it was left in the sun for a couple of hours prior to our break time. For quite some time I was a milk monitor; a task that involved piercing the bottle tops and inserting straws. In addition to milk we were also given malt on a spoon and later, halibut oil capsules. As well as milk monitors we had ink monitors whose job it was to fill up the ink wells on a daily basis. Each desk had an ink well and we were provided with pens with nibs for writing. Ball point pens were not invented until much later.

There was never a question of children eating junk food in those days, as it just did not exist. There was a 'sweet shop', as it was referred to, on the corner of Flaxton Road and Timbercroft Lane named 'Corbett's' after the owners. However, sweets were rationed, so that there was no chance of us over indulging. In any case, even if the sweets were not rationed we did not have the money to buy them. There was one sweet shop in Plumstead High Street, referred to as the "home made sweet shop", where one could exchange one's sugar ration for sweets. Another aspect concerning the shortage of sweets was that if you saw one of your friends chewing some chewing gum and you asked for some, then your friend would give you a part of the gum which he/she was chewing! Potato crisps were the only form of snack available in the 40's and they were a fairly rare sighting. They used to be delivered in metal containers and would be quickly sold. Although there was a fish and chip shop in the 'Hollow' (Plumstead Common Road) where they made their own crisps. Ice cream was not on the menu at all during the war and I can remember after the war when my mother and father took myself and my sister all the way to Lewisham on a 54 bus just to have my first ice cream. There was another shop on the opposite corner of Timbercroft Lane and Flaxton Road that was a grocers. When there were no sweets available we would sometimes buy Oxo cubes and eat those. A further alternative was a mixture of cocoa and sugar which we would make up at home and wrap in paper to take to school.

As well as sweets being rationed, all of the basic food items e.g. bread, meat, eggs, were rationed and in short supply. We, in common with our neighbour's, kept chickens in our back garden to give us a plentiful supply of eggs. At Christmas time it was incumbent on my

father to slaughter a chicken for dinner, which involved 'wringing' the poor birds neck. This was the only day of the year when we had chicken and it was a real treat. Food was never wasted and any waste vegetable matter was put into the 'pig bin'. There was a pig bin in every street, which was emptied regularly and taken off to a pig farm. In those days bread and milk were delivered by horse and cart and any manure droppings from the horses were swiftly picked up to put on the vegetable patches, which were in evidence in most gardens.

We were certainly healthy children and got plenty of exercise. At frequent intervals, we were taken by the school to Plumstead baths, which were on Plumstead High Street. This meant walking down Flaxton Road and across Winn's Common and then descending to the High Street, accompanied by our teacher. After swimming, we would walk back via a bakers shop where, if we could afford it, we would buy a bread roll for a halfpenny and eat it as it was.. Cakes were on offer at the bread shop but not affordable to us poor children. During school holidays, as a special treat, we used to go swimming at Danson Park Lido, an outdoor swimming pool which was located on the far side of Danson Park and as there was no bus service between Plumstead and Welling, it involved a walk of a couple of miles each way.

There were school teams for football and cricket and we would play other schools, always on Saturday mornings. I was the captain of both the football and cricket teams. The other schools were Conway Road, High Street (or Bannockburn Road) Woodhill, Foxhill and St Margaret's. Our football games were always played on Winn's Common and one distinct memory was having to carry the goal posts and cross bars from their storage point, near Lakedale Road, to the other end of Winn's Common, both before and after the games. There was a metal spike on the end of the goal posts for inserting into the ground but these got severely worn down as the post carrier, under the weight of the post, dragged the metal spike along the ground. There were no changing facilities at Winn's Common and we used to merely turn up in our football strip and change our boots on arrival. The Timbercroft colours were Blue and White, exactly the same as those worn by Blackburn Rovers today. At the conclusion of every game it was our duty to give cheers to our opponents with a chorus of " Three cheers for the winners/losers - hip hip hooray, hip hip hooray…" On one afternoon each week we would have our football practise at the 'Club Grounds' in Swingate Lane. The ground was so named because it belonged to Kirkham Street Working Man's Club.

The Football master was Mr Hersee, who not only coached but participated in the games, knocking us young boys over when he went on one of his long runs from one penalty area to the other. The school cricket games were played on Plumstead Common alongside where the 53 and 53a buses lined up, near the Old Mill public House. On one occasion I took seven wickets for three runs and on the following Monday morning I was called up in front of the school at Assembly by the headmaster, Mr Huggins, and was congratulated for my feat - was I proud !

Apart from organised games, we were always playing in the parks or in the bombed houses. During school holidays, after the war, we would walk and play in Shrewsbury Park, Eaglesfield park, Jackwoods, Castle Woods, Plumstead Common, Winn's Common and Bowmans Hollow. We also liked to watch football and I and my close friends were mad Charlton Athletic followers, as I still am. In 1947, when Charlton won the FA Cup, I can remember going to the 'Valley' to see them play Rochdale and Preston North End on their

way to the final. We would walk to Charlton, down Foxhill and Nightingale Vale along Ha Ha Road and down through Maryon Wilson Park, unaccompanied by any adults. When the game finished we would exit the ground in the crowd and take our feet off the ground to be carried along. I now realise how dangerous this particular practise was. When Charlton reached the cup final the game was broadcast on the radio, or the wireless, as we called it. Chris Duffy scored for Charlton towards the end of the game and I ran into the street where neighbours were shouting and cheering. My cricket team was Kent and once a year they played against Surrey at the Rectory Field at Blackheath and we all went along on the 53a bus.

Another kind of excitement was roller-skating, but the skates in those days had metal wheels rather than the current rubber ones. After a lot of use the wheels wore down and made much noise on the pavements. As children, we would often be chased by men who were working nights and needed to sleep during the day, whose sleep we constantly disturbed by the clip clop and rumbling of roller skate wheels on the pavement outside their bedroom windows. . In winters when it was really cold and when the milk was delivered and left on the doorstep, it would freeze and expand and force the tops of the bottles, leaving a tasty fare for marauding sparrows and pigeons and tits. Our heating was from coal fires and we a had tin bath which was placed in the living room for our **weekly** bath in front of the fire. Nobody had the luxury of a shower in those days. Face flannels left in the bath room would freeze.

Close to the swimming baths in Plumstead High Street was the school dentist. I think it was called the Health Centre and it was a real sinister looking place built of red brick. The dentist was on the top floor. In those days, if an extraction was required, then gas was often used. As a preliminary, a rubber bung was put into ones mouth and then the awful mask was put over ones face and the gas turned on. Compared to the dentist of these days, it was really a dreadful experience. We used to sit in the waiting room, from where you could hear the incumbent of the dentist's chair screaming and a short while later the victim would emerge, inevitably bleeding as a result of the extraction. Then a bell would ring, which meant it was your turn - dreadful Another part of the Health Centre's responsibilities was the checking of children's scalps for evidence of nits (head lice) or ringworm. This involved the nurse, affectionately referred to as "nitty Nora", visiting the school and running a disinfected comb through each child's hair.

Life has changed so much in the ensuing years. I still visit Plumstead on the odd occasion to visit a friend, Keith Sneddon, who attended Timbercroft School and has lived in Chelsworth Drive all of his life.

They were happy days and it is only now, on reflection, that I realise the struggle that our parents had in feeding and clothing us, often in times of extreme austerity. As previously stated, I lived in Raymere Gardens and I can honestly say that I knew every family that lived there. We were brought together by a common bond. After the war ended, there were parties in the street and street social gatherings. There were also regular street day outings by coach, or " chara " as we called them, to the seaside resorts. What a far cry from today.

Timbercroft School Days & Others

Roy McPherson

I was born in December 1954 at my grandmothers house in Chestnut Rise. After a brief stay in Lee Green, we moved into the maisonettes in Kingsdale Road in 1957. Half of the road was unmade but as there were only half a dozen car owners, so it didn't matter much. I loved the location very much, with the Woolwich Cemetery, Rockliffe Gardens and Fanny on the Hill behind us, Bostall Woods down the road and Winn's Common were even closer and it really was a superb place for an adventurous kid to grow up.

We used to explore every nook and cranny of our location and I used to know the local woods like the back of my hand, even at a young age. The cemetery behind us was no longer a working cemetery and was a convenient place to go scrumping for conkers and chestnuts. The grounds used to be patrolled by a park keeper, the parkie, and his Alsatian dog. We used to delight in teasing the poor chap and gauging at what point he would release the dog. At that moment we'd hare for the dividing wall and clamber up and over into our back gardens, generally with an angry dog on our heels. On one occasion the damned dog cleared the wall and that sent us scampering for a suitable hiding place. When the parkie wasn't about we sometimes went to Rockliffe Gardens, a place I loved. To my young mind it was a magnificent place and we used to search for newts and frogs amongst the stones in the pond. I was fascinated by the huge white rocks and waterfalls.

My mum used to take us to Woolwich, via the 51 bus in Swingate Lane, and as a treat we'd sometimes go on the Woolwich ferry with the paddle wheels where a starry eyed youngster could walk through the upper gangway of the engine room and watch as the huge pistons did their work. On a pleasant day it wasn't unusual for families to go backwards and forwards a number of times, sometimes getting off at North Woolwich to stroll in the Victoria Gardens or to look at the tugs moored up by the small jetty. North Woolwich always seemed an alien place. When we were older, we'd take the ferry across and then come back via the foot tunnel.

I was sent to Timbercroft School; my family had been in Timbercroft Lane for many years and my grandfather still lived in 'the pan'. He was a character and used to cycle to the Who'd a Thought It pub for a few bottles of stout, sometimes managing to get home in one piece but once he fell off his bike into some chaps hedge!

I enjoyed my time at Timbercroft and like most youngsters of the day I loved and respected our teachers. Mrs Prior (she had a motor scooter and white domed helmet, Mrs Farley, Mr Seabrooke, Mrs Jones and the indomitable headmistress Mrs Davies. In the playground, Mrs Scottie cast her gentle eye over the mass all-in games of football or British Bulldog. On one occasion we were playing cricket when Mrs Scottie blew the whistle to signal the end of play. I walked across the batsman, only to receive a thumping hit to the forehead from the batsmen as he played an invisible stroke. My forehead split like a ripe tomato sending blood everywhere and then having Mrs Scottie scurrying to my aid. I was packed off to St Nicholas hospital and received a few stitches and an overnight stay for my trouble.

Timbercroft Primary, Class 2a, Mrs Prior's class. 1964.
Back Row:
Alan Webb, Susan Buss, Bunny Duberry, Melanie Hyam, Fred Denny Katherine Stansfield, Angela Beardsal, Linda Young, Jane ??
Next Row:
Jane Steward, Angela Bailey, Sarah Nelson, Linda Plaistow, Andrew Strong, Mrs Prior, Lynne Elliot, Tony Parkinson, Roy McPherson, Brian Russell.
Next Row:
Anon, Nigel Easterling, Jean House, Dave Garnsworthy, Christine Storey, Amanda Janes, Susan Wiggins, Susan Hubbard, Terry Thurley, Elaine Callow.
Front Row:
Agatha McFoy, Liz Burnett, Patricia Howett, Tony Fields, Victor Parker, Graham Hindle, Wendy ??

I loved football and was picked for the school football team; our home pitch was Winn's Common. The Common was a challenge because the wind would sweep up off the Thames and sweep across the Common. The changing rooms were the very basic rustic hut up near the scrap merchant yard and the washing facilities consisted of a trough running the length of the outside wall served by two cold water taps. The water used to be freezing cold and could cauterise a wound in seconds. Our football shirts were of the old collar and cuff variety and were large squares in blue and white, just like Blackburn Rovers. Our boots were like solid lumps of leather, as was the ball, and a good 'header' resulted in an imprint on ones forehead of the stitching and lacing!

But ah...those were the days.

Valerie Daniels, nee Wren, Remembers

I was born in Greenwich in 1947. I went to Burrage Road school, first in the infants, in 1952, then into the seniors, until 1962.

My dad, Charles Stanley Wren (Charlie).

My mother was Irene Wren, nee Gibbs, and she was born in Woolwich, in 1924, my father was Charles Wren, (Charlie). He was born in Creton Street, Woolwich, in 1922, behind Cuffs. They weren't very well off but they tried their best with what they had. We lived at 74 Villas Road, Plumstead, in a prefab, one of four, with a very large garden that backed onto my best friends house. Her name was Jean Johnson and I struggled to get to her garden as ours was full of weeds that came up to my neck, great fun to hide in though, when hiding from my mother or father as I was always being asked to go to the local shop on the corner of Villas Road, I believe it was called Pearces, an old shop opposite where you were able to find whatever you wanted there, not like today, having to go to Tesco's. I recall one day I was asked to buy some corned beef or ham, depending on what my father wanted in his sandwiches, and I remember getting three slices of corned beef, but, by the time I got back home, I had eaten a slice and I would hear my mother say," Blimey, you don't get much for a qtr." But I never let on I had eaten it and to this day it has been a secret I have kept to myself. There was an old bomb site adjacent to the bottom of our garden where all the local kids would come and play, we had such fun there.

Valerie aged seven.

In our garden was an oval tin shed. I remember my mother every Monday wash day standing doing the washing all day there, with her mangle and her wash board and sunlight soap, saucepans of boiling water were on the kitchen stove all day and then carrying them to the shed, what a hard time it must have been.

The prefab was large, or so I thought, compared to my friends homes in their terraced houses, but it was very cold and it only had a very small fire, but it was home.

Christmas time was a struggle, only getting a few presents, maybe a doll or a couple books, Enid Blyton and the Famous five, I was so happy reading about all the adventures they got up to. I would spend hours and hours reading.

We always seem to have stew to eat, it was on the menu most days and my mother always put in pearl barley, which I hated, then, when money was short, we would have corned beef

and mash, which was the meal of the day.

Later on, when things started to improve, my mother would take on a job working from home, making lampshades. She would get me to help her put on the fringing. She would sit up all night making them for just a few shillings.

I remember the big Shire horses galloping up Villas Road, going to the Brewery yard and the horses often left there 'mark' on the road, and when they had gone past everyone would come out with there buckets to collect the horse poo for their gardens, I heard many an argument who was going to have it!

My days at school were fun, but I remember many days when there was thick smog and having to wear a scarf round my face, you couldn't see a thing, but I still managed to find my way to school.

I remember the Matchless motorbike factory. I can still smell the place, it must have been the glue or something they used there. I always could smell it going to and from school at Burrage Road Primary. It was a very happy time at school, with lots of friends, but I should have paid more attention (as I am sure most people would say). I can still hear Miss Dodson, the Headmistress, shouting at everyone to stop looking out of the windows, towards the AJS factory and to get on with our work, but it never seemed to happened. she was very scary.

When I was a little older, at about twelve years old, my father managed to buy a motor bike and sidecar, we were the talk of the street. I would be on the back pillion seat of the bike and my mother was in the sidecar. We went to Brighton; what a different world down there, we thought we were royalty, our neighbours were very envious.

Valerie, school prefect, Burrage Road School, aged 14.

My grandparents lived at 74 Vicarage Road. They were the Gibbs family and my grandfather worked in the Woolwich Arsenal, as did my father, as an electrician. I would wait for him outside the gates every evening for him to come out. So many men worked there, but it never seemed a very happy place to work, but it was a living, although not a very good one, as I would remember going to school with cardboard in my shoes as they had large holes in and my mother would say you can have a new pair next week, but of course, it never happened and I went to school like that for weeks.

I spent my childhood playing on Plumstead Common with a few friends, or going to Abbey Wood on the trolley bus to the skating park, where I fell and broke my leg in two places, not a happy time. I remember going to Woolwich and in Beresford Square market there was a pie and eel shop called Manzies. I would spend ages looking through the shop window watching as they cut up the live wriggling eels and serving them boiled to the customers. I always thought how awful it was to eat such things and even today I still wouldn't eat them.

Next door to there was a shoe shop where, when my mother had the money, she would take me and buy me some new shoes. It was a large shop, filled from floor to ceiling with shoe boxes and I recall the shop assistant having to climb the big ladder to find the right shoes, how she managed to remember where they all were puzzled me, but she did. The market was always buzzing with people everywhere. I always loved that place.

I had very long hair while at primary school, with long plaits. One day, my mother had enough of my moaning and she said, "Right, we are going to get them cut off!" She took me to Knolls the barber shop, which had the ladies hairdresser up stairs. The hairdresser cut my hair so short that I swore I would never let her cut it ever again.

Saturdays was always the day I looked forward to. We would go to the cinema by the ferry in Woolwich. One of my friends would pay and go in, then, when know one was looking, would open the side door and let us all in. We never ever got caught and we were so happy as we had money to buy sweets with. I never told my mother, she would have been so cross, such fun.

After leaving school I went into an office job in the Charlton Road called Cawoods. I was a telephonist and worked with a girl called Elaine Chappell. We got on very well and I worked there for several years, until I met my husband. He worked next door to Cawoods, in a garage as an apprentice for his two cousins, Gordon and Tom, in Charlton garage. He would wave to me everyday as I went by. We were only sixteen and we finally got married in 1968. My husband's name is Alan Daniels and he was born in Kidbrooke SE3 in 1947. We were later married in 1968, in Rainham, Kent, where my mother and father moved to.

My husband Alan, 1961. Woolwich District Under 15s football team, He is front row, far left. Boy holding the football is Billy Bonds, who played for Charlton and West Ham. Some of the other boys came from Bloomfield Road and Earl Rise schools.

We have three children, Joanne, Nigel and Noel, and four grandchildren. We now live in Cornwall, near St. Ives, for the last 30 years. We are all very happy and we have very happy memories of our childhood.

If only children today could have the freedom that I had, I am sure they would be as happy, but the world we live in today doesn't let them, so much for progress.

Wailing Sirens Over Welling (Kent)

Bob Coote b 1932

Happy pre-war days.

I well recall the day the Prime Minister announced "We are at war with Germany…"

Being just seven years old and playing on the floor with the inevitable toy soldiers I was, misguidedly, absolutely delighted! Such excitement — childhood shelters the mind from the ramification of what was to come — and what was to colour and influence the rest of my life.

Things of course started quite slowly and gradually. Eventually, we were in to the period of night bombing — during which my dad who was wounded in the first world war and therefore at home most of the war on essential duties, would not call for us to take night time cover in the Anderson shelter at the bottom of the garden. Rather, we would wait until bombers were in our immediate area before taking refuge, then deciding if it were for a short period or for the rest of the night. The concentrated over flying of our area in N.W. Kent by the Luftwaffe in the actual Blitz period, and their habit of jettisoning their bomb loads when meeting up with the AA gunfire as they came across the suburbs, led us to shelter more or less constantly for that particular period.

Some school pupils were evacuated of course, but the remainder of teachers were still with us and education went on apace. However, classes were entwined with orderly filing down the school shelters where some semblance of lessons were continued under lantern torch light. We had strict instructions that if the air raid warning sounded when we were on the way to or from school — we were to hurry to the nearest safety — that of school or our own home — which ever was nearest. I well remember dawdling all the way to school after the lunch break at home, and some yards short of the school entrance — the siren sounded and I set off with friends for the swift 20 minute walk back home ! So you see, that far into the war — I was still being bla'se about the whole thing.

A lunchtime raid saw a bomb demolish two houses just across our road, and I sat out on the pavement and watched the rescue squads do their bit. We had somehow got a bad feeling about this sudden solo raid, and as the bomb exploded, mother and I were in the garden shelter at the time. Coming out of cover and making my way up the garden I saw a large lump of shrapnel of the lawn, and picking it up — suddenly realised it was very, very hot !

Shrapnel was the 'currency' among the school kids — we all went around with biscuit tins full of shrapnel, bullet and shell casings, appraising each others collections and doing various 'swaps' between friends.

One night a bomber jettisoned its load of incendiary bombs over the immediate area — and next morning, out with older friends, we were up the trees in the street and carefully loosening and freeing many, many incendiary bombs that were hung up in the branches.

These would be spirited away to some hiding place for later unscrewing and emptying the incendiary content from the undamaged casing. This led to many clandestine fireworks displays in the days following.

School was reduced at one stage to either mornings or afternoons — due to the shortage of teachers one supposes now, at the height of the blitz — I was allowed on occasions to join dad and a neighbour for "fire watching" which was really standing in the garden — watching all the target illuminating flares float across the night sky, and the ack ack bursts setting up a backdrop of flash effects and on the famous night that the bombers burned down the docks and the east end — I was able to comfortably sit in the back garden and read the daily newspaper from the light of the intense fires some 10 miles distant.

My fond memory of this era was that in the school holidays my friends and I were allowed out all day with a jam sandwich and a bottle of pop; parents would not worry about us overly — and we would creep home as the sun sank and our tummies told us it was tea time. We would wander far and wide, streetwise for any enemy activity of course — and were thankful for the impressive freedom we enjoyed even then as children.

Following this we had a comparative peaceful time — that was until the fatal night that the first V1 flying bomb roared over on the way to town. Not knowing what this was of course became very frightening at that stage, but as the days passed by and we became aware of the weapon, we lived "around" their appearances by night and day. Very soon we boys were asked to keep a watch during school holidays to the South from a vantage point on the opposite side of the road (now a bomb site) we would scan the horizon and blow an ARP whistle when a doodle bug was heading our way, or appeared to be a hazard. This helped the local housewives to carry on with their work and activities till the last minute.

The V2 was to be next to confront life, this time once we knew the nature of the beast we became as a community very complacent about the whole thing.

Of all the suburbs in London, why would it fall in our Borough — and if it did — why would it fall in our area; what were the actual chances of it falling in our road we thought. Going about our business or living life as near normal became the mode — for one way and another the thinking was that if you stayed home you were just as likely to 'cop' a rocket strike as you were if you were out shopping or visiting elsewhere. A bit of the "if your name is on it" philosophy I suppose.

I well recall the lunchtime at home with the one o'clock news announcing that 'forces had landed on the European mainland that morning' and therefore we realised it was D day. This was marked with whole fleets of aircraft heading out across the skies — only to return later in the day with engines on fire — or great holes in the body and wings. People would stop and things came to a standstill, to watch these fighting machines pass by on a daily basis at this stage.

I was always allowed to go up to town on my own for the day in the holidays, taking tram or train, doing a well practised route from Charing Cross through to Regent Street to look at the toy shop there, then turning right at Oxford Circus and strolling the whole length of Oxford Street and Holborn only turning down Kingsway after checking out a couple of 'magic' shops which was my bag in those days — aged 11 onwards.

Then of course at age thirteen I was off up town to join the happy celebrations of VE day, and spend best part of the day enjoying the atmosphere, and being allowed up town again — this time for an overnight sleep in the Mall to witness the Victory march past shortly after..

Children don't appear to have such 'enjoyable freedom' today !

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'

Boys blackberrying on Bostall Heath.

Wedgebury Childhood Memories

Molly Vaux (nee Wedgebury

My name is Molly Vaux (nee Wedgebury,) and I was born on May 9th 1941 in South East London. I lived with my parents, Rose and Alfred Wedgebury, and my older brother, David, near Bostall Heath. I have a few early memories of the war, which include the sounds of air raid sirens and the 'Big Guns' which were situated on Bostall Heath, not far from Woolwich Arsenal. They made a very distinctive noise that we could hear inside our house.

Rose Wedgebury with her two children Molly and David Wedgebury.

The earliest memory I have is of being thrown into the air raid shelter at the end of the garden. I think my mother caught me, but I can remember there being a lot of noise outside, and being held.

I can also remember the Iron Table that we had to shelter under indoors - I think it was a Morrison Shelter with old mattresses under it. (I think this was later on during the war.) One day my brother David and I were sheltering in it while there was something going on in the sky. I'm not sure why, but I wanted my mum, so I left David and went looking for her. I found her upstairs in the bath. She said "go downstairs you naughty girl". I remember thinking "you're the naughty girl!"

Another day I went with my mother and my nan, Mabel Mott, up to the school to collect my brother. The siren went, so we ran down to the school shelter where the school children were sitting on long benches - they were all sitting very still and quiet. A bomb fell right in front of our house, leaving a large hole in the road. We were told to move into the back of the house, which we did. The bomb was defused, but for years afterwards you could see where the hole had been filled in, and the road had been repaired.

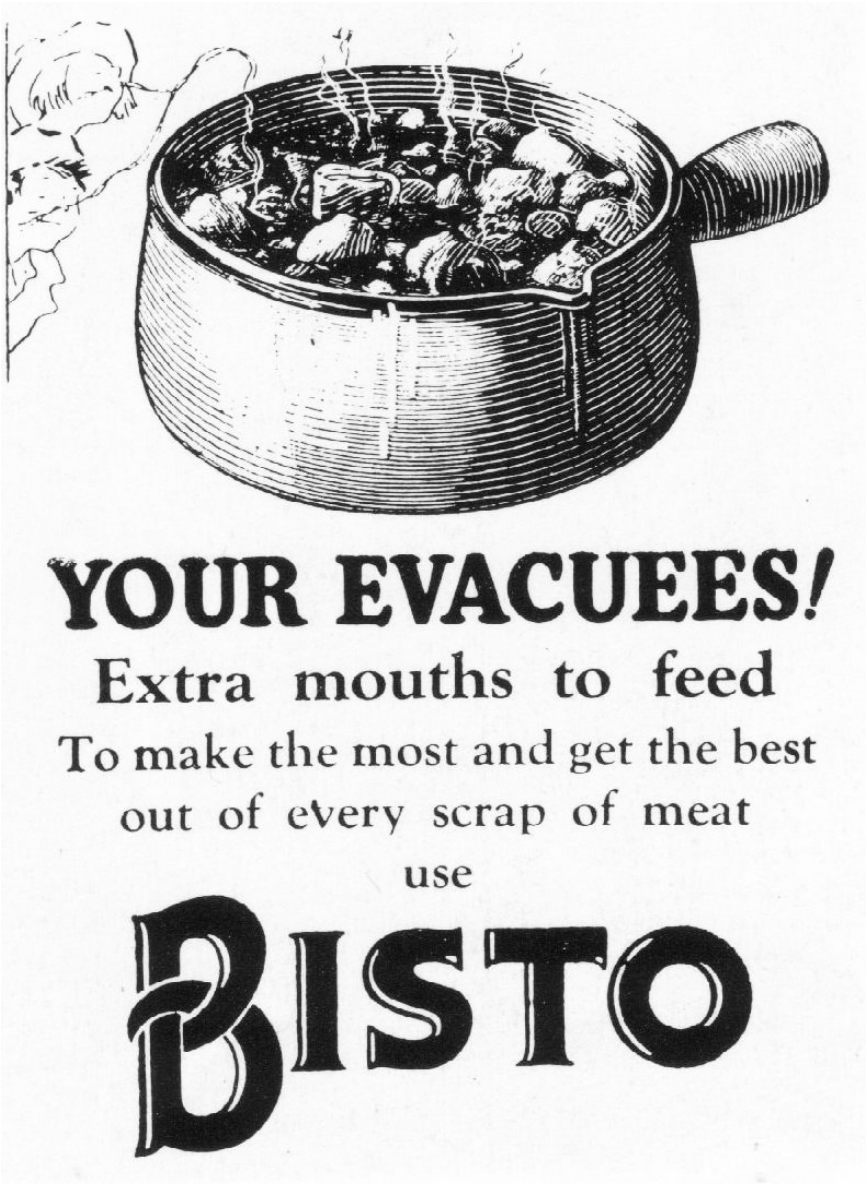
My father, Alfred Wedgebury, was in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, and ended up in hospital at Tunbridge Wells with diesel poisoning. I went with mum and nan to visit him. I am not sure if we went by train or bus, but I do remember walking across fields to reach the hospital. Dad was in a ward with other soldiers and the place was alive with mice. Dad opened a draw and pretended to kill some with his shoe. He then sat me on a chair and said I was to keep watch.

I don't remember being told that the war had ended. However, I first became aware that it had ended on May 9th 1945, which was my fourth birthday. I opened the front door and waited for the postman to come with my birthday cards. Mum said that he wouldn't be coming as the war had ended and it was a public holiday.

I think the most haunting memory is of a neighbour who was always leaning on the gate

looking up and down the street; this was after the war. One day I asked mum why she was always there. She told me that her son had been in the Navy and she was waiting for him to return. He never did.

With kind thanks for this story to: 'WW2 People's War, which is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'



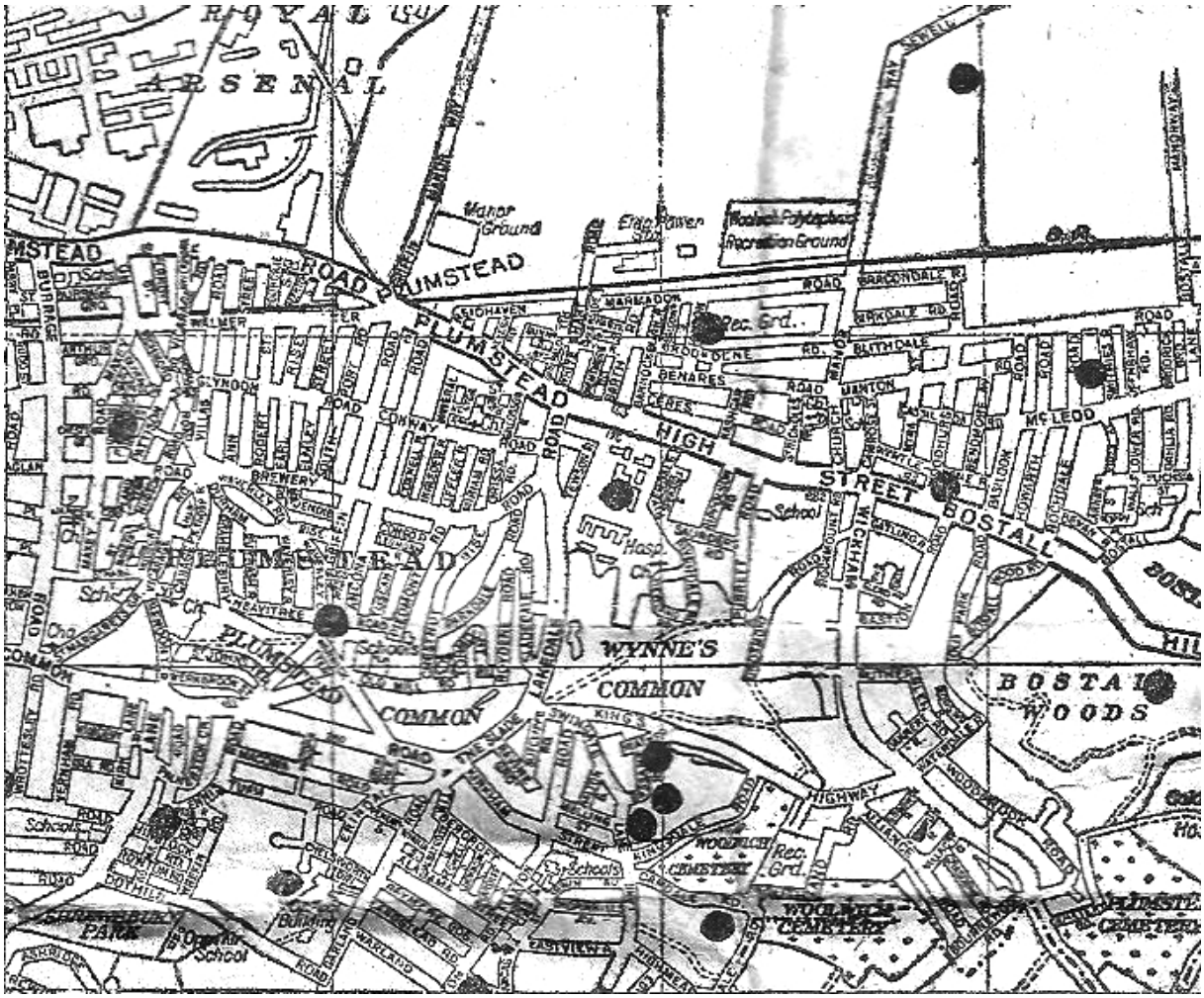
Where The VI's Landed In WWII.

The Flying Bombs

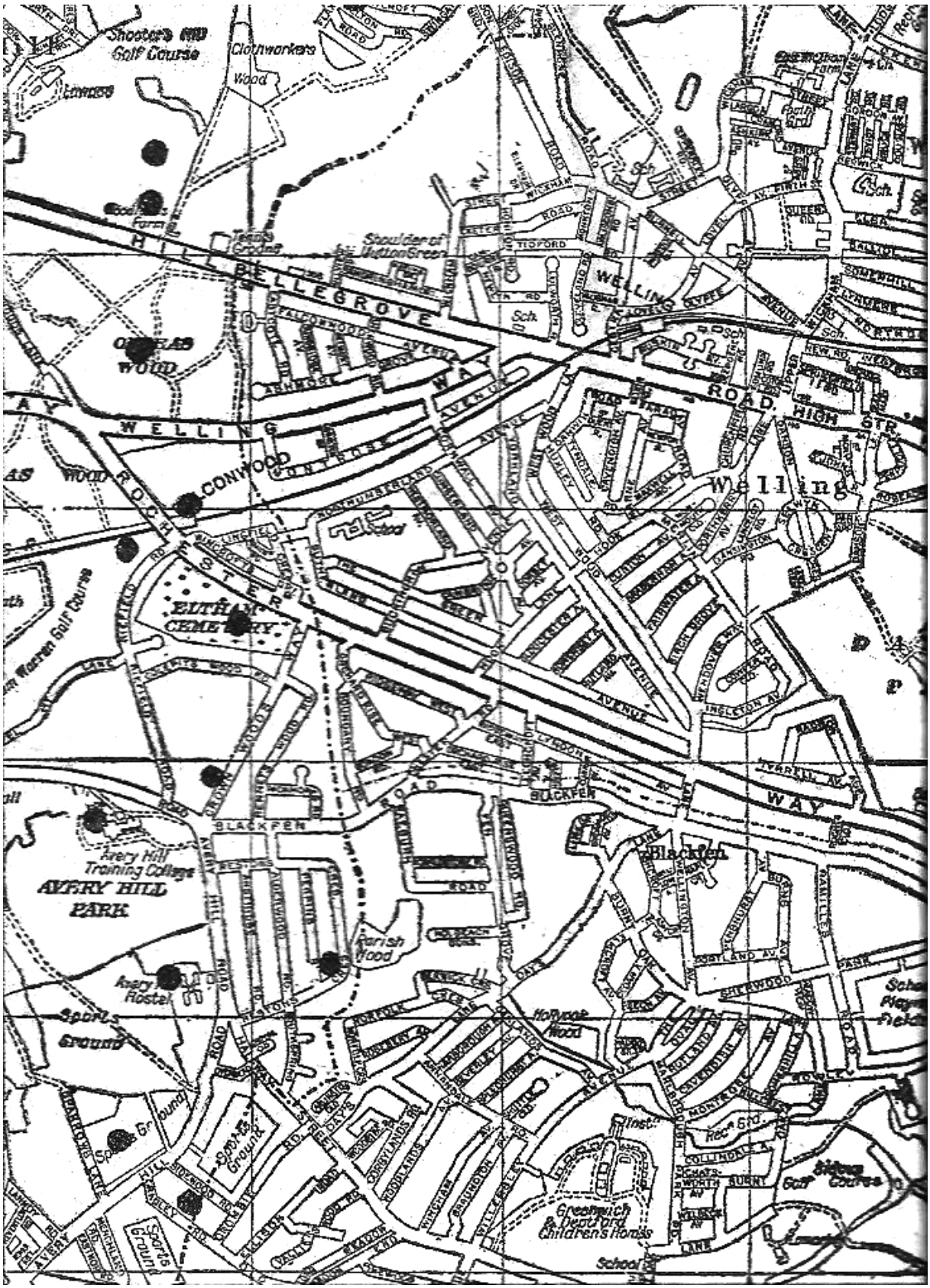
I am unsure of the date of this publication, but it is an insight as to just where these flying bombs crashed to earth during the later part of WWII.

The map is by kind permission of Margaret Forbes.

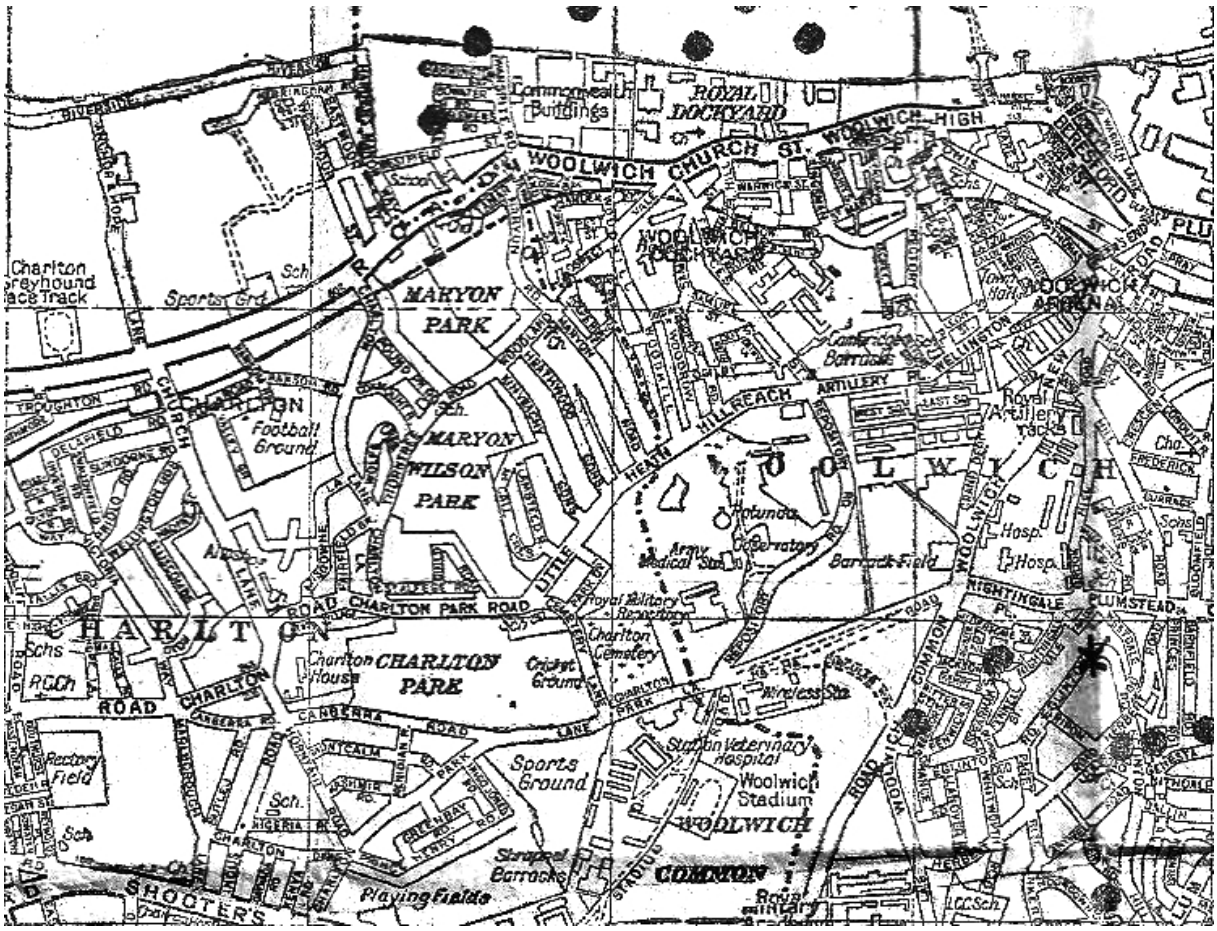
I have cut it into four sections and enlarged each section to more easily identify roads and other places where the V1's; also known as 'Buzz bombs', 'Doodle bugs' and Flying bombs, crashed. When the engine roar was heard over head, looking up you saw it flying with a tail of flame. If then it cut out, folk would know that it was about six to eight seconds to take cover, as it would then randomly glide down, crashing to earth with a tremendous deafening explosion, causing much immediate destruction which also sent out a huge blast wave which caused windows and doors to be blown in and hundreds of roof tiles and slates to be blown off roofs and many fences and structures to be blown over, trees and shrubs stripped of all their foliage and the washing on the line blown away never to be seen again.



***Map one**. The black spots in each maps section mark where the 'Flying bombs' landed.*



Map two. *This map joins onto the bottom of map one.*



Map three. *This map joins onto the left hand side of map one.*

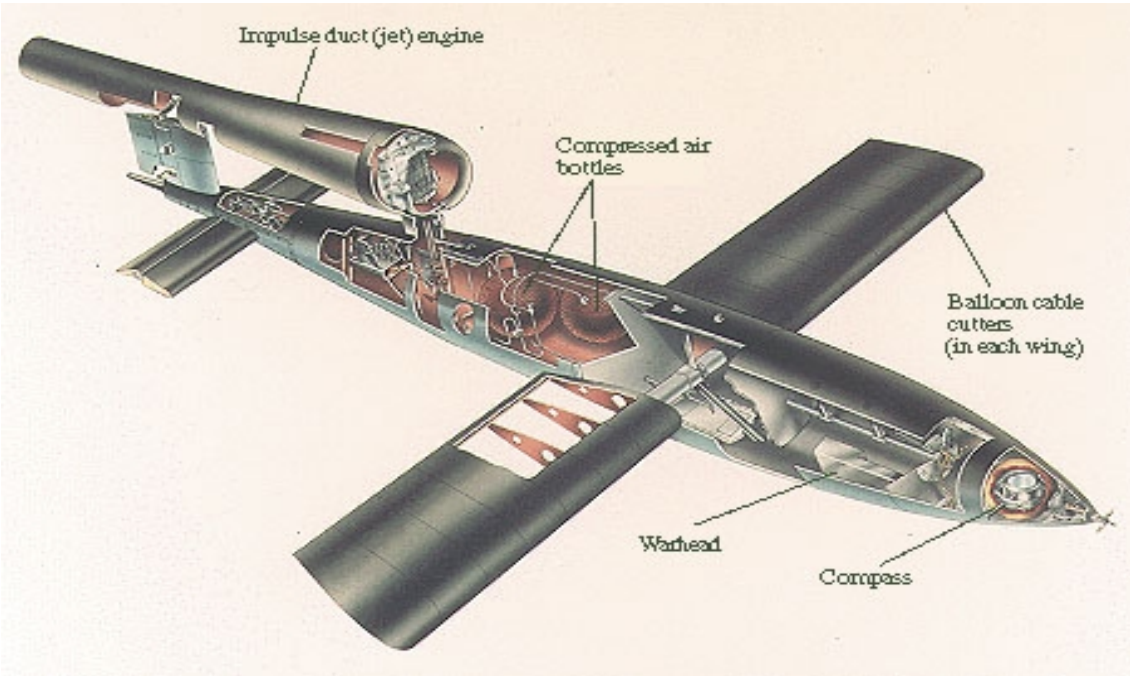
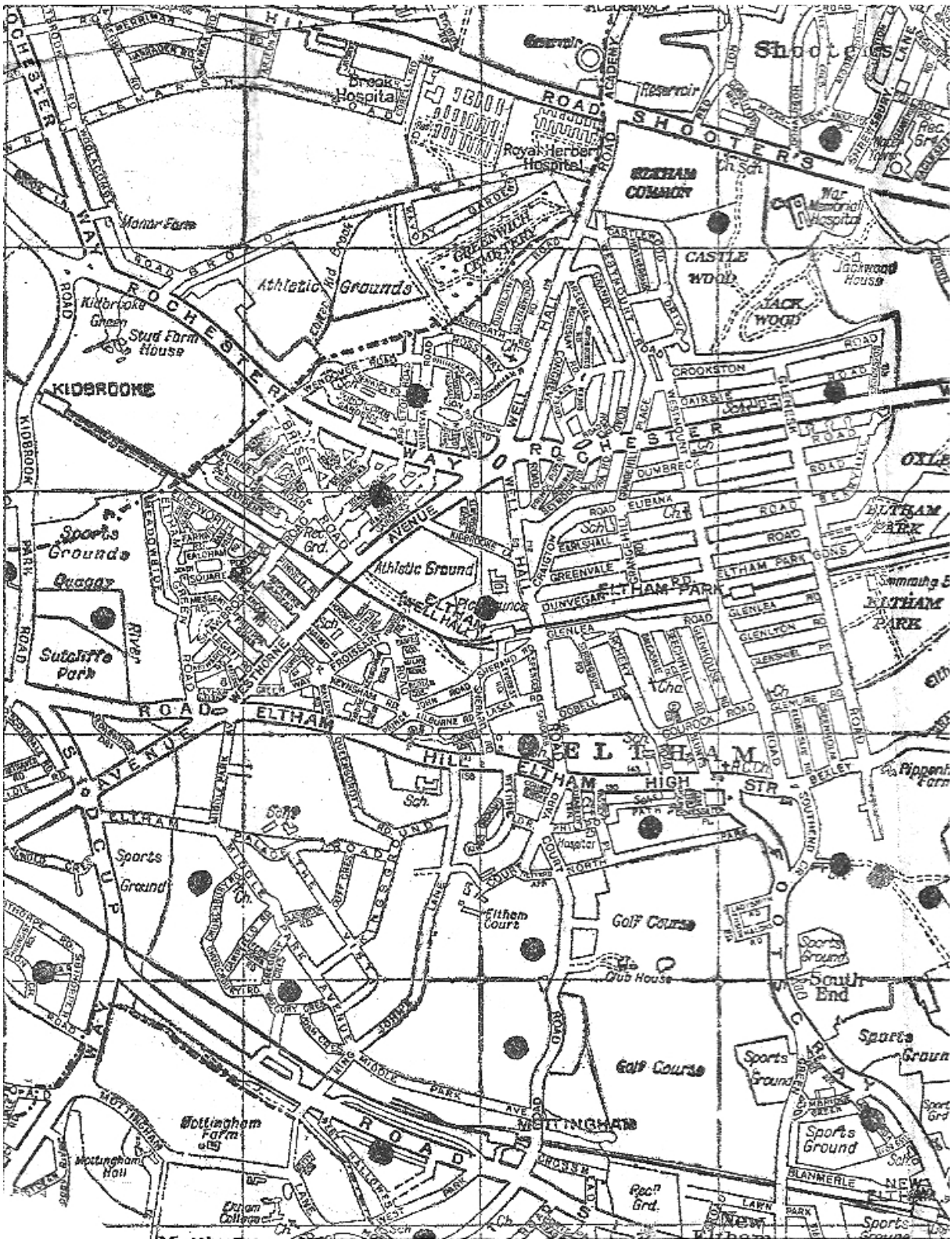
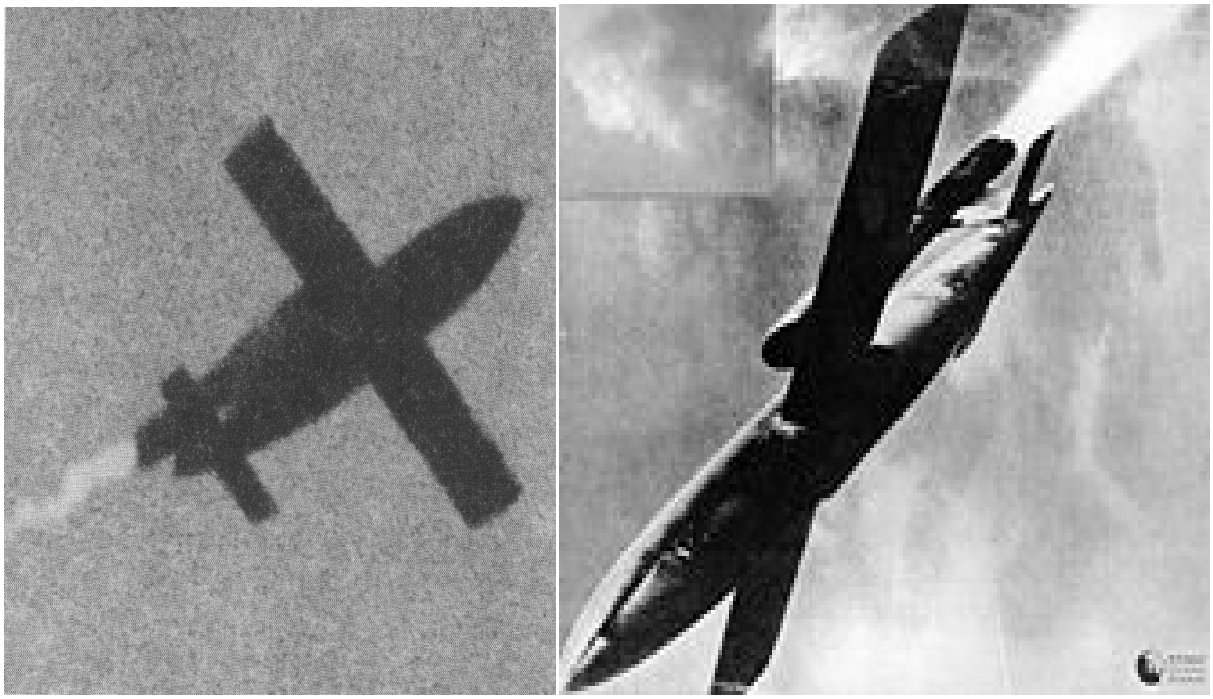


Diagram of a V1 flying bomb.



Map four. *This map joins onto the left hand side of map two.*

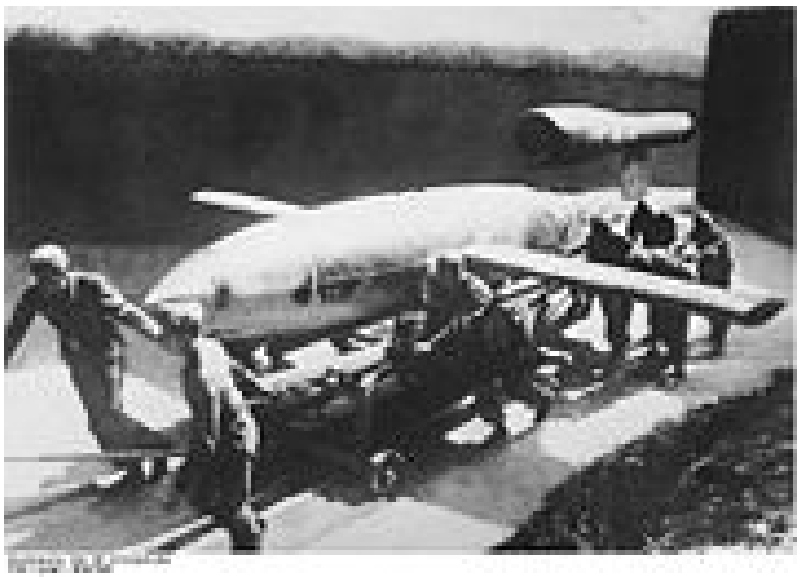


V1's, as photographed in flight. Note the tail flame plume from the exhaust system.

An odometer, driven by a vane anemometer on the nose, determined when target area had been reached, accurately enough for area bombing. Before launch the counter was set to a value that would reach zero upon arrival at the target in the prevailing wind conditions. As the missile flew, the airflow turned the propeller, and every 30 rotations of the propeller counted down one number on the counter. This counter triggered the arming of the warhead after about 60 km (38 miles). When the count reached zero, two detonating bolts were fired. Two spoilers on the elevator were released, the linkage between the elevator and servo was jammed and a guillotine device cut off the control hoses to the rudder servo, setting the rudder in neutral. These actions put the V-1 into a steep dive. While this was originally intended to be a power dive, in practice the dive caused the fuel flow to cease, which stopped the engine. The sudden silence after the buzzing alerted listeners of the impending impact. The fuel problem was quickly fixed, and when the last V-1s fell, the majority impacted under power.

With the counter determining how far the missile would fly, it was only necessary to launch the V-1 with the ramp pointing in the approximate direction, and the autopilot controlled the flight.

On 13 June 1944, the first V-1 struck London next to the railway bridge on Grove Road, Mile End, which now carries this plaque. Eight civilians were killed in the blast.



A German crew rolls out their V-1.

Almost 30,000 V-1s were made. Approximately 10,000 were fired at England; 2,419 reached London, killing about 6,184 people and injuring 17,981. The greatest density of hits were received by Croydon, on the south-east fringe of London.

Antwerp, Belgium was hit by 2,448 V-1s from October 1944 to March 1945.

Anti-aircraft guns

The British defence against the German long-range weapons was Operation Crossbow. Anti-aircraft guns were redeployed in several movements: first in mid-June 1944 from positions on the North Downs to the south coast of England, then a cordon closing the Thames Estuary to attacks from the east. In September 1944, a new linear defence line was formed on the coast of East Anglia, and finally in December there was a further layout along the Lincolnshire-Yorkshire coast. The deployments were prompted by changes to the approach tracks of the V-1 as launch sites were overrun by the Allies' advance.

On the first night of sustained bombardment, the anti-aircraft crews around Croydon were jubilant — suddenly they were downing unprecedented numbers of German bombers; most of their targets burst into flames and fell when their engines cut out. There was great disappointment when the truth was announced. Anti-aircraft gunners soon found that such small fast-moving targets were, in fact, very difficult to hit. The cruising altitude of the V-1, between 600 to 900 m (2,000 to 3,000 ft), was just above the effective range of light anti-aircraft guns, and just below the optimum engagement height of heavier guns. The altitude and speed were more than the rate of traverse of the standard British QF 3.7 inch mobile gun could cope with, and faster-traversing static gun emplacements had to be built at great cost.

The development of the proximity fuse and of centimetric, 3 gigahertz frequency gun-laying radars based on the cavity magnetron helped to counter the V-1's high speed and small size. In 1944, Bell Labs started delivery of an anti-aircraft predictor fire-control system based around an analogue computer, just in time for the Allied invasion of Europe.

These electronic aids arrived in quantity from June 1944, just as the guns reached their firing positions on the coast. Seventeen percent of all flying bombs entering the coastal 'gun belt' were destroyed by guns in their first week on the coast. This rose to 60% by 23 August and 74% in the last week of the month, when on one day 82% were shot down. The rate improved from one V-1 destroyed for every 2,500 shells fired initially, to one for every 100. This still did not end the threat. V-1 attacks continued until all launch sites were captured by ground forces.

Barrage balloons

Eventually, some 2,000 barrage balloons were deployed, in the hope that V-1s would be destroyed when they struck the balloons' tethering cables. The leading edges of the V-1's wings were fitted with cable cutters, and fewer than 300 V-1s are known to have been brought down by barrage balloons.

Interceptors

Fighters were mobilized to intercept the V-1, though most aircraft were too slow to catch a V-1 unless they had a height advantage, allowing them to gain speed by diving on the V-1 from altitude. Anti-V-1 sorties by allied aircraft were known as "Diver patrols" because of the tactic used. Hawker Tempests, Gloucester Meteors and clipped-wing Spitfires were used on Diver patrols because these aircraft had sufficient speed to catch a V-1 and were also armed with 20mm cannon. Attacking a flying bomb was highly dangerous for pilots; solid machine gun bullets had little effect on the V-1's sheet steel structure, and if an explosive cannon shell detonated the warhead, the subsequent explosion could destroy the attacking fighter. The first interception of a V-1, by F/L JG Musgrave of No. 605 Squadron RAF, took place on the night of 14/15 June 1944.

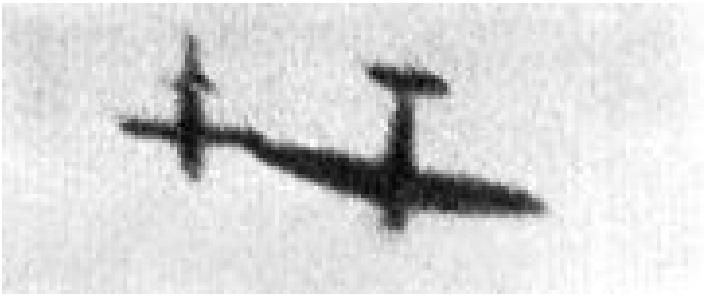
The Defence Committee expressed some doubt as to the ability of the Royal Observer Corps adequately to deal with this new threat, but the ROC's Commandant Air Commodore Finlay Crerar assured the committee that the ROC could again rise to the occasion and prove its alertness and flexibility. He oversaw plans for handling the new threat, codenamed by the RAF and ROC as "Operation Totter".

Observers at the coast post of Dymchurch identified the very first of these weapons and within seconds of their report the anti-aircraft defences were in action. This new weapon gave the ROC much additional work both at posts and operations rooms. Eventually, RAF controllers actually took their radio equipment to the two closest ROC operations rooms at Horsham and Maidstone and vectored fighters direct from the ROC's plotting tables. The critics who had said that the Corps would be unable to handle the fast-flying jet aircraft were answered when these aircraft on their first operation were actually controlled entirely by using ROC information both on the coast and at inland.

The V-1 also lacked the primary points of vulnerability of conventional aircraft: pilot, life-support, and a complex engine. Hits to the pilot, oxygen system, or complex reciprocating engines of a piloted aircraft by a bullet or small shell fragment can destroy its fighting capability, but the V-1's Argus pulse jet provided sufficient thrust for flight even if damaged. The only vulnerable point of the Argus was the valve array at the front of the engine. The V-1's only one-shot stop points were the two bomb detonators and the line from the fuel tank

— three very small targets buried inside the fuselage. A direct hit on the warhead by an explosive shell from a fighter's cannon, or a very close anti-aircraft shell explosion, were the most effective forms of gunfire.

When V-1 attacks began in mid-June 1944, the only aircraft with the low-altitude speed to be effective against it was the Hawker Tempest. Fewer than 30 Tempests were available. They were assigned to No. 150 Wing RAF. Early attempts to intercept and destroy V-1s often failed, but improved techniques soon emerged. These included using the airflow over an interceptor's wing to raise one wing of the V-1, by sliding the wingtip to within 6 in (15 cm) of the lower surface of the V-1's wing. If properly executed, this manoeuvre would tip the V-1's wing up, overriding the gyros and sending the V-1 into an out-of-control dive. At least three V-1s were destroyed this way. That the method was from time to time actually effective could be seen over southern parts of Holland when V-1s headed due eastwards at low altitude, the engine quenched. In early 1945 such a missile soared below clouds over Tilburg, Netherlands, only to gently alight eastwards of the city in open fields.



A Spitfire using its wing-tip to 'topple' a V-1 flying bomb.

The Tempest fleet was built up to over 100 aircraft by September. Also, P-51 Mustangs and Griffon-engined Spitfire XIVs were tuned to make them almost fast enough, and during the short summer nights the Tempests shared defensive duty with de Havilland Mosquitoes. There was no need for airborne radar; at night the V-1's engine could be heard from 16 kilometres (9.9 mi) away or more, and the exhaust plume was visible from a long distance. Wing Commander Roland Beaumont had the 20mm cannons on his Tempest adjusted to converge at 300 yd (270 m) ahead. This was so successful that all other aircraft in 150 Wing were thus modified.

In daylight, V-1 chases were chaotic and often unsuccessful until a special defence zone was declared between London and the coast, in which only the fastest fighters were permitted. Between June and 5 September 1944, the handful of 150 Wing Tempests shot down 638 flying bombs, with No. 3 Squadron RAF alone claiming 305. One Tempest pilot, Squadron Leader Joseph Berry, of No. 501 (Tempest) Squadron, shot down 59 V-1s, and Wing Commander Beamont destroyed 31.

Next most successful were the Mosquito (428), Spitfire XIV (303), and Mustang (232). All other types combined added 158. Even though it was not fully operational, the jet-powered Gloucester Meteor was rushed into service with No. 616 Squadron RAF to fight the V-1s. It had ample speed but its cannons were prone to jamming, and it shot down only 13 V-1s. These were the first air combats between two jet-powered aircraft in history, although that achievement is usually ascribed to the battles between *manned* jet aircraft during the Korea War in the fall of 1950.

In late 1944 a radar-equipped Vickers Wellington bomber was modified for use by the RAF's Fighter Interception Unit as what would now be described as an Airborne Early Warning

and Control aircraft. It operated at an altitude of some 4,000 feet over the North Sea to control Mosquito fighters intercepting He 111s flying from Dutch airbases for airborne launches of the V-1.

Deception

To adjust and correct settings in the V-1 guidance system, the Germans needed to know where the V-1s were landing. The V-1 operators asked German intelligence to get this impact data from agents in Britain. All these agents were double agents under British control (the Double Cross System), so the British sent deceptive data to the Germans.

V-1 impacts were often reported in the public press, so the British did not send *false* reports. Instead, they sent locations of actual impacts, especially those in central London, or "long" (to the north-west), but they omitted most of the impacts falling "short" (to the south-east). The Germans were thus induced to adjust their range settings down, shifting the "Mean Point of Impact" (MPI) away from central London to less populated areas.

In August 1944, the V-1 launch sites along the French coast were occupied by Allied forces. The Germans relocated V-1 operations to the Netherlands. When they resumed launching, their MPI was back in central London, but again the British deception shifted it elsewhere, this time to the east-north-east.

This deception operation suffered some interference from a German agent in Spain, who fraudulently claimed to have agents in Britain. He sent in a lot of fake impact reports which the Germans accepted. Fortunately, thanks to Ultra, the Allies read his messages and were able to adjust for them.

The policy of diverting V-1 impacts away from central London was initially controversial. The War Cabinet refused to authorize a measure which would increase casualties in any area, even if it reduced casualties elsewhere by greater amounts. It was thought that Churchill would reverse this decision later (he was then away at a conference); but the delay in starting the reports to Germans might be fatal to the deception.

Sir Findlater Stewart of Home Defence Executive then took responsibility for starting the deception program immediately. His action was approved by Churchill when he returned.

End of the V-1 attacks

By September 1944, the V-1 threat to England was temporarily halted when the launch sites on the French coast were overrun by the advancing Allied armies. 4,261 V-1s had been destroyed by fighters, anti-aircraft fire and barrage balloons.

The last enemy action of any kind on British soil occurred on 29 March 1945, when a V-1 struck Datchworth in Hertfordshire.

Assessment

In early December 1944, American General Clayton Bissell wrote a paper which argued strongly in favour of the V-1 compared to conventional bombers.

The following is a table he produced.

(12 months) vs V-1 flying bombs (2¾ months)

	Blitz	V-1
1. Cost to Germany		
Sorties	90,000	8,025
Weight of bombs tons	61,149	14,600
Fuel consumed tons	71,700	4,681
Aircraft lost	3,075	0
Men lost	7690	0
2. Results		
Houses damaged/destroyed	1,150,000	1,127,000
Casualties	92,566	22,892
Rate casualties/bombs tons	1.6	1.6
3. Allied air effort		
Sorties	86,800	44,770
Planes lost	1,260	351
Men lost	2,233	805

V-1 flying bomb. Fieseler Fi 103Flakzielgerät 76 (FZG-76) In service 1944-1945.

Specifications

Weight: 2,150 kg (4,750 lb). Length: 8.32 meters (27 feet 3¾ inches). Width: 5.37 meters (17 feet 6 inches). Height: 1.42 meters (4 feet 8 inches).

Warhead : Amatol-39. Warhead weight 850 kg (1,870 lb).
Engine: Argus As 109-014 pulse jet engine.

Operational

Range: 250 km (150 miles). Speed: 640 km/h (400 mph), flying between 600 to 900 m (2,000 to 3,000 ft).

The V-1 was designed by Robert Lusser of the Fieseler company and Fritz Gosslau from the Argus engine works, with a fuselage constructed mainly of welded sheet steel and wings built similarly or of plywood. The simple pulse jet engine pulsed 50 times per second. The characteristic buzzing sound gave rise to the colloquial names "buzz bomb" or "doodlebug".

Facts etc. with many thanks, were extracted from Wikipedia.

Woolwich Empire, A Brief History

Facts originated from an article by John Earl

Closed: The Woolwich Empire awaits its fate, 1959.
Photo: Kind permission Greenwich Heritage Centre.

The *Woolwich Empire* had always been a working man's theatre; a grand place to go for a good night of variety.

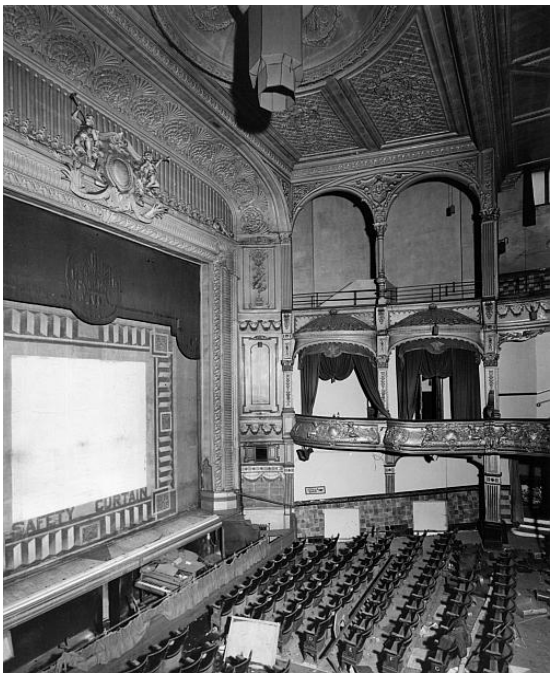
Built in 1836 as the Theatre Royal it was redesigned and enlarged by a Samual Bernard. It became known as the Royal and later became known as the Barnard's .

Further reconstruction and renovations followed, carried out by the well known theatre architect Frank Mactham around 1898 and was contracted out to Messrs Thomas and Edge of Woolwich. It opened around 1899.

The Auditorium, from the stage wing.
Photo: Kind permission of the Greenwich Heritage Centre.

The result of this major work was a wonderful new music hall, refurbished throughout with beautiful interior decorations of a Venetian flavour with relief plasterwork surrounding the two tiers of balconies and the four box seats. These are all picked out in terracotta and blue with a rich gold relief. This was extended into the very lavish looking ceiling, creating a wonderful embroidered relief of great lavishness.

The dress circle, newly decorated in a rich blue material, had seating for up to 306. The stalls or pit had a seating capacity of around 1,000 and the balcony had seating for between 700–800 folk.



A view from one of the box seats. Note the grand piano in the orchestra pit below the stage front.

The overall effect was a wonderful, very up to date, and beautifully decorated auditorium.

The theatre continued under Bernard's name until about 1932 when, it was licensed to the Woolwich Empire Company. Then in 1939, around the start of WWII, the theatres closure was announced. However, another company took it over and it managed to keep going. Sadly though, the *Woolwich Empire's* days were numbered, as it was outdated and under threat, particularly from the nearby picture theatres, namely the *Odeon* and the *Granada*.

The *Granada* made it especially difficult for the *Empire* by regularly staging variety shows, which they staged between films. These variety show acts were also generally of a higher class and shown in a much more moderner and grand environment, compared to the now run down and, what was then considered, old fashioned atmosphere of the *Woolwich Empire.*

Up in the' gods'. Pictured after it closed, 1959. Photos: Kind permission Greenwich Heritage Centre.

The *Woolwich Empire was* situated in Beresford Street, along the road from the Beresford Square market and on the way to the Woolwich Free Ferry. It was, however, a good night out for all the family, and many working class folk and their families had very fond memories of an evening, or of a matinee day show and especially those of the pantomimes held at Christmas time. Memories of the many stand up comedians, standing, outlandishly dressed, centre stage, bathed in the beam of the bright spot light, as they told their cheeky stories and singing and strutting the boards with their saucy jovial songs, all to the encouragement of the loudly appreciative and laughing audience. Many an artist, a singer, a magician, a knife thrower, jugglers, tumblers, trapeze artists, fire eaters and many other dare devil acts once thrilled the wide-eyed audiences, both young and old, as they sat enthralled on the edge of their seats.

The nearby Army Barracks and the not so far off docks, then so very busy and often packed full of ships, entertained many a visiting seafarer, and of course the many hundreds of army

personnel that were stationed at the huge Woolwich Barracks during those busier hey day years. Clapping, cheering and whistling their appreciation to the many fine artists of the day, along with the very hard working chorus of dancing girls and not forgetting the 'ever still' nude, posing amongst a fine net curtain, lit up by an array of coloured lighting.

The orchestra played with a full array of instruments down in the dark orchestra pit, situated in front and directly below the stage; each individual music stand lit up with its own hooded light.

There had been a theatre on the site of the *Woolwich Empire* from as early as 1834. The first was known as the *Portable Theatre* because it was constructed originally as a portable and moveable structure.

This was replaced later by a proper building in 1835 and was called the *West Kent Theatre.*

(Woolwich and Plumstead were then part of Kent.)

Then in 1837, the theatre was renamed the *Duchess of Kent's Theatre*.

Later on, in 1892, it was again reconstructed and renamed *Barnard's Theatre,* also known as and called the *Theatre Royal.*

In the 1920's it was again renamed the *Woolwich Empire.*

The *Woolwich Empire* however, began to draw less and less audiences until it was playing to virtually empty seats.

Eventually the *Woolwich Empire* finally closed its doors to the public in 1958.

Sadly, it was demolished in 1960.

The *Woolwich Empire's* site had been the site of a theatre for over 120 years.

An Auto-stacker parking building was constructed on the site, at an enormous and very controversial sum back then, to the ratepayers of Woolwich. On the grand opening day of this innovative building, Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret opened the new building with much pomp and ceremony by pushing the button to send the first car up in the lift to be stacked automatically into the multi-stacker car park. Nothing happened! There the car stayed and after many failed attempts to get the lift with the car working, it eventually proved to be a complete white elephant and never ever worked.

It was eventually demolished without ever staking or parking a single car. The demolition costs, which were very expensive, raised even more angry cries from the understandably very disgruntled ratepayers of Woolwich.

Somehow, I think the old *Woolwich Empire* had managed to get its own back!

See story: The Woolwich Empire Remembered by Colin Weightman in Common folk vol 2.

With acknowledgements to an excellent article on the Woolwich Empire Theatre by John Earl on Theatres in Woolwich, London, on the web site of ***arthurlloyd.co.uk*** *and with many thanks also to Arthur Lloyd. Photos with kind permission from the Greenwich Heritage Centre.*

Also in this series is my other book 'Common Folk'

Another spendid large collection of early stories and photographs of the Plumstead & Woolwich and districts.

'Common Folk' is one book consisting of two large volumes packed with lots of early stories and photos.

'Common Folk' is a nostalgic look back in time through this large collection of stories and photographs to a time when life was a lot slower but also, all too often, a lot harder. When it was harder to make ends meet, the depression, the war years, rationing, and poverty but also stories of happier times, when folk got by on much less and appreciated things a lot more.

This large book is an important piece of social history. A very large collection of stories and photos, as told by ordinary folk, in their own words, about what life was like for them and their families in the Plumstead & Woolwich districts in those now far off bygone days.

Because I have printed this series of books myself, to keep costs down to a minimum, this big two volume book is still very reasonably priced, even though it's mailed from New Zealand.

Posting, purchasing details and more information, plus some book reviews about my first book Common Folk and more on my current book 'More Common Folk' are available on my web site, at:

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