

My Early Years In Stowupland (as I remember them)

By John Paddy



Our bungalow at 6 Columbyne Close had a coal bunker inside the kitchen next to the pantry, the coal was tipped through a hole in the front wall of the house and boards kept the coal in when the door was opened. Mum would do the washing in the copper in the corner of the kitchen after lighting the fire underneath, water was also heated in the copper before being transferred to the tin bath for bath night, the same water being used for the whole family. In the living room was a coal fire which converted into a cooking range. As children, we spent many happy hours in the large garden the bungalow had. One day my sister Rita and I were playing at the top of the garden obviously doing something wrong to make Dad bang on the window so hard, he put his hand through it - not a 'happy chappy'.



A postcard of Columbyne Close. You can see the coal chutes that John mentioned which went straight into the kitchen, they are the dark rectangles near the windows.

Next door at No 5, lived Mr & Mrs Diaper. I used to go round to exchange newspapers and always stayed a while. They had two pedal operated organs with pull-out stops. Next to the open fire behind Mr Diapers chair was an assortment of guns and a 'His Masters Voice' wind up gramophone with its huge loudspeaker. I used to watch Mr Diaper cutting wood logs on his belt driven saw bench which was powered by a water cooled engine - a very dangerous machine.

At No 4, lived Mr & Mrs Jimmy Southgate and their son Jeff, he was slightly disabled and had trouble keeping his balance, hence he was known as 'Wobbly' to us children. One of the funniest things I remember was when he offered Dad and any children present a ride on his three wheeled cycle, several people tried but usually finished up in Mr Steadman's fence at No 3. The fence ran parallel with the road and kept Mr Steadman's chickens in. Today, houses are on this land.

At No 8, lived Mr & Mrs George Manning who had a pure white bull terrier named Judy which my sister Rita used to walk, sometimes I went too, the reward being a bar of chocolate or a bag of sweets. Mr Manning was the manager of the Co-op menswear shop in Bury Street Stowmarket.

At No 11, with his Mother, lived another wonderful character Bob (Dazzler) Horrex. A self taught shoe repair man who carried out his work in a garden shed behind the house. I spent many happy hours sitting with him while he carried out his work with not a machine in sight - there was nothing he would not take on! When darkness came, the workshop was lit by tilly lamps. Sitting with him, and me being so young, it was amazing to see him hand stitch real leather to the soles of shoes and when using tacks, holding them in his mouth. His constant companion in his shed was his dog which went everywhere with him. Bob was also the local racing bookie and anyone wanting to place a bet gave it to him at the appropriate time. Bob would bike to Stowmarket to place the bets with Ned Richards before calling in the Kings Head in Ipswich Street for his pint.

I went to School at Stowupland Primary calling for my friend John Hill at No 16 we walked across the meadows now occupied by Trinity Walk. The first house was built in about 1950 and I must say provided a wonderful play area for us children no safety security fencing in those days and we didn't consider it dangerous, but it was! On the building site, there was a big circular pit in which lime was stored for plaster. Our playing was often interrupted by a visit from our village policeman on his bike.

One hard winter, us children joined by some adults had great fun skating on the ice on Potters meadow pond at the bottom of Columbyne Close. I was told not to go near the bushes as the ice would be thin there, but being me I ventured too near and Yes! Through the ice I went! To make things worse, I went under the ice, but thankfully the adults got hold of me quickly and I think David Melhuish carried me home very frightened, wet and cold for a dressing down from Mum and a change of clothes. I have never forgotten it and although we do not get such harsh winters now the lesson is still relevant as there are still some ponds in the village. Us youngsters had great fun playing around the ponds in what would be classed as foolhardy today, but in the early 50's it was thought nothing of.

Happy Memories!