

OXHEY VILLAGE ENVIRONMENT GROUP

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History Sheet No.20

MEMORIES OF OXHEY LANE

Mrs. Kay Clarke

I was born in North Watford and attended Parkgate Road Junior School and Leggatts Way Senior School the first year it opened. After we moved to Laycott in Oxhey Lane in 1935, we were taken by ta-xi each day to London Road Senior School "with three others of a family who lived in Little Oxhey Lane beyond the railway bridge. Their father was a farm worker for Henry Smith of the Poplars in Oxhey Lane. Later, when more children moved into the Carpenders Park area, a coach was run to and from the Bushey schools.

Oxhey Lane was a narrow winding lane but was widened about 1937 to its present width. Sydney Brazier kept the fann at Little Carpenders and Highfield, a large house opposite the farm, was a school for young ladies until just before the war when the school moved to High Wycombe.

In 1935 Carpenders Park Station was just a halt for golfers using Oxhey Hall Golf Course. You had to tell the driver of the train if you wished to alight there and he would stop if you were waiting on the platform, made of wooden sleepers, to go to Watford or London.

Bungalows and a few houses were built and Carpenders Avenue came into being; other roads spread out from it and the estate grew up just before the war began.

Oxhey Chapel was used for services once a month with weekly services in the Old Barn. At one time, due to damage to the Old Barn, all services were held in Oxhey Chapel which was then beautifully set in the driveway to the Blackwells House. Backed by meadows and surrounded by daffodils and rhododendrons I remember it one sunny Easter morning, early service was about to begin and the door stood open revealing the gleam of brass and silver on the altar prepared for Easter and ablaze with golden daffodils without and within; such a joy to behold.

Highfield was taken over by AA Command during the war. As Girl Guides we darned socks for the soldiers and we attended the dances in the ballroom. Mary, Winston Churchill's daughter, was posted there for a while. One morning as I set off in the dark to walk to the station I was challenged by a soldier in Oxhey Lane who shone a powerful torch 011 me and I looked along the barrel of his rifle as he said, "Halt, who goes there?". I think: he was surprised as I was. I explained I was on my way to work. He was guarding a radar mat set up in a field. He walked the length of his beat with me and, for the time they were there, he and fellow guards were welcome escorts along the lonely stretch of road. They were stationed at Highfield. We had some of them home to tea and occasionally one would stay while off duty, enjoying the comforts of a home while a long way from their own.

I remember the original wooden cross on Watford Heath and my sister remembers poppies laid there 011 Armistice Days. I remember Watford Heath Farm before the flats were built and the pink granite drinking fountain erected in memory of Mr. Ely which stood in the little island where the bus from Hemel Hempstead terminated its journey and we began our long walk with shopping along Oxhey Lane to Laycott.

After I was married at St. Matthews Church in 1948 (the little church of St. Alphege which we had fought to have built for Carpenders Park was not licensed for marriages) we lived in rooms in Oxhey Avenue. In 1949 we bought a small cottage in Lower Paddock Road. It had been built for workers in the brickfield there about 1886.

In 1952 we returned to Lower Paddock Road from a spell with the RAF in Egypt and settled down in No. 25 with our two sons. I shopped in the local shops, Lovedays with its fresh baked bread and buns and delicious Russian slices, a family favourite, the Handy Stores with its many useful things and treasures to delight the children, Dixies the butchers, a hardware store next to it, Browns and Turners both greengrocers, Grants the chemist (Mr. Grant would give advice on minor ailments) and the Post Office. Last, but not least, Palmer's the Grocers; Mr. and Mrs. Palmer were mends to everyone and Charlie Hill their assistant always smiling, cheerful and obliging. When Sylvia, the Palmers' daughter, had a baby they put out a sign saying 'It's a boy'. I would take my order book in on a Tuesday and pay the previous week's bill and my goods would be delivered on Friday. Dried goods, fruit, rice, etc., were weighed up and packed skilfully into blue paper bags. Biscuits were displayed in glass fronted boxes in front of the counter. Mr. Palmer would take a few from each to make a pound of mixed biscuits and there was always one for the children who watched with anticipation.

There was a corner shop in Lower Paddock Road on the corner of Field Road kept by an elderly couple and Prossers Newsagents on the opposite corner.

There was little need to travel to Watford to shop, we could buy almost everything we wanted in Oxhey Village.

The children attended Watford Field School as their grandfather had before them.