

A GREAT PLACE TO GROW UP

Keith Julier

My family moved to 35 Oxhey Street, (now 70 Oxhey Avenue), in 1935 when I was five years old and, like most of the local lads, I first attended Oxhey School until the age of seven, moved up to London Road then, at fourteen, on to the Technical and Art Institute in Queens Road, Watford where I studied engineering.

Most of my memories of Oxhey are similar to those of others who have contributed to the History Sheets so my efforts here are in many ways an extension, amplification or an addition to those recollections.

Oxhey Street, at that time was a continuation of Oxhey Avenue and started just about where Lime Close is today, at the alley that led to the allotments between the Avenue and the railway. It carried on down to the junction with Pinner Road at the Co-op stores. At that point, adjacent to the request stop for the number 302 bus, was a public fire alarm. "Break Glass In Case Of Fire" it said. I can't for the life of me remember what you had to do then. You don't see them today, like local policemen on the beat, which I suppose is why I can't recall it ever being vandalised. Ron Fordham may remember different of course, he lived a mere stones throw of it (no pun intended).

No.35 Oxhey Street was in that row of terrace houses that faced the bottom end of Mary Bromet's home, Lime Lodge, bounded as it was on the adjacent side by Heath Road. The fence to the property was about six feet high and was ideal against which to play ball games. Fortunately, the Lodge was at the top end of Heath Road, thus the noise we must have created was not a nuisance. I remember the flower garden fetes that were held in the grounds amidst the sculptures that Mary Bromet had created over her long career. All the ladies took the opportunity to wear their best hats as I recall.

Oxhey Street was also one of the places where the man with what we called a barrel organ used to stop and play a few tunes. In actual fact, I believe the instrument was a hurdy-gurdy. I remember us kids used to reckon he wasn't a proper barrel organ man because he didn't have a monkey. Then there was the man with his pedal operated grindstone who would sharpen your scissors, shears or knives. More popular was the Walls ice-cream man with a similarly pedal powered tricycle icebox. His triangular shaped ice lollies and Sno-Fruits were indeed a treat, but dripped out of the bottom of the chequered wrap if you didn't eat them quickly.

Don and Letty Bennell mentioned the horse-drawn wagons taking coal from the station yard to the gas works. Hauling their loads up and down the cobbled hill was a hazardous business at the best of times, particularly going down when, in icy weather, the cart would truly try to go before the horse. I recall some sort of additional braking device slung on chains beneath the cart for such conditions, something like a metal, wedged shoe for the wagon wheels. On the way back to the station yard, a sign on the left hand side of the arch by the King William pub would advise drivers to "Slacken The Bearing Rein When Going Uphill." Is it just possible that the metal sign is still there?

I don't remember much about my time at Oxhey School except getting a woven iron holder in a terrible tangle that Miss Hammond thought rather amusing, which was rather fortunate, it could have been one of the four that made up the "Strike Force," Misses Oven, Morley, Sewell and Racket; perhaps that is why the Germans didn't invade! I have a photograph taken there during the Empire day festivities of 1936. Edna Rickard (now my wife), was dressed in a sari representing India -and I wore an old scout hat with the brim turned up on one side