

The Manders Family

My father E. W. (Ted) Manders lived in Canada with his brothers, although born in England. They all returned for the 'Great War' and Dad served in the 'London Irish Rifles' in France and Palestine. He married Grace (nee Harding) on his demobilisation and bought no. 72 (later 136) Oxhey Avenue. Ted had many jobs but spent most time as a speculative builder of large houses especially in Cassiobury Park and Bushey, 'Woodwaye' and 'Coldharbour Lane' especially. Faced by the defection of his partner, he had to rent out no.72 and live at 19 Cross Road, Bushey – a rented house. Dad earned his living as a carpenter but eventually paid off his debts and became a representative for a concrete manufacturer. In 1937 the family returned to no. 72. Incidentally, at one time he owned a Brickworks in Oxhey Lane, but the seam of clay ran out and he lost the business. I owned the old gun they used to clean the chimneys with by firing scrap iron up it to loosen the soot.

All his 5 children were born at Oxhey Avenue. The eldest, Gladys, became an 'Ovaltini' and went on the stage. She adopted the name Wendy Manners as a professional name. A protégé of the Fayers (or Sayers) family she appeared at Watford Palace Theatre as Cinderella (the youngest at 16) and the coach was a fabulous all glass affair drawn by white Shetland Ponies from one of the great circuses. Wendy teamed up with Donna Dodd from Chalk Hill, Oxhey and they toured the Music Halls and Clubs as 'DON and DONNA'. They tap danced and played the accordion. Wendy also performed as an Acrobatic Dancer – bending her body in amazing shapes. During the WW2 she helped run 'The Star School of Dancing' and also acted as Post woman. Wendy married Lesley Jacobs, a naval seaman and after the War lived in Spain. Lesley died and Wendy now lives in Nova Scotia with her only daughter.

James (Jim) came next. He joined the Royal Navy and was torpedoed on HMS Cairo on one of the Malta Convoys. Later he served on HMS Sheffield fighting the 'Bismark' and, later, on the Arctic and Atlantic Convoys. He married Hilda Hanham, whose family owned Bushey Post Office. They took a shop at Berkhamsted and had 2 children, one a doctor. Jim died but Hilda is a very active grandmother.

I am next – David – born in 1931 at Oxhey Avenue. Went to Oxhey School at Chalk Hill, where I remember a teacher called 'Brook Bond' after the Tea. On Empire Day I was the Red Indian Chief who wanted to kill Captain Smith but Pocahontas saved him. My brother Jim (10 years older) made me a super tomahawk but the teacher confiscated it as dangerous! I wept bitterly!! A highlight at the school was the visit of the Policeman to teach Road Safety and the song we always sang him:- "Look to the Left and look to the Right and you will never, never get run over."

Later I went to Ashfield School, Bushey, where I was unhappy because the children regarded me as a 'foreigner'. Together with John Mainwaring, another 'foreigner', we fought back to back most playtimes against the Bushey Mob. It did not help that Miss England – a teacher, made us favourites for the school plays' 'leads' as we spoke 'proper' English and not the local dialect. Another boy there was called Kenney, son of a milkman, from the road opposite Haydon Road (Vale Road). He was a brilliant artist and won an award for a Savings Poster during the War. I wonder where he is now.

Finally I was sent to the Central School at Watford, having failed miserably at the Grammar School Exam. I earned notoriety having got 100% for English and 5 marks for Maths. Dicky Brennan (from Watford Heath) was really brilliant at Maths, which earned him a commission as Navigator on Canberra Bombers in the RAF. I went to work at Stimpson, Lock & Vince at Bushey and then at the little office at Oxhey Station. We were Estate Agents and I learnt to drive. The manager was a Mr Eaglesfield, as I remember.