

# OXHEY VILLAGE ENVIRONMENT GROUP

October 1998

History Sheet No.14

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## THE COAL WHARF

*Please refer to ordnance survey map overleaf*

Do you know where the Coal Wharf is - or was? I don't think many people know. It is the short road running between Bushey Station and the Arches.

Why is it called The Coal Wharf? Many years ago Watford made its own gas, the gasworks being just through the Arches from Oxhey, right next to the railway embankment where Wickes and one or two other businesses now stand. There is still one gas holder there (often known as a 'gasometer') but at one time there were three, always full of gas.

But to make gas coal is needed many tons of it to satisfy the needs of Watford and district. It was not possible to deliver coal straight into the gasworks from the railway, although it was right next to the line, because the very high embankment sidings could not be constructed there. So a marshalling yard was built at Bushey Station, between the off-licence in Pinner Road and where the station car park now is. There were about six tracks where the trucks were lined up. Then small two-wheeled horse-drawn carts loaded the coal from the trucks and went down the road through the arches to the gasworks. They unloaded and the empty carts returned by the same route.

In those days there was a continual procession all day long of these carts rumbling up and down the Coal Wharf.

On the corner of Aldenham Road and the Coal Wharf, where the car sales room is now, was a public house, the name of which escapes me at the moment.\* Below it, facing Bushey Station was a row of little cottages. It is thought that these were built for the workers on the main railway line.

The local railway line was electrified in the early 1900s. I was born in Kingsfield Road and I can remember, when I was very small, my father built me a little shelf on the garden fence so that I could stand and watch the men at work on the line. Up to that time it was only steam trains branching off at Bushey Station to go to the Junction via the High Street Station. The original Bushey Station was a little further up the line than it is now, it was behind the marshalling yard, and was approached by the road between the filling station and the sandwich bar. I believe the old station is now a car sales room. When I was travelling up to London some years ago the mainline platforms still had the flights of stairs leading down into the old station.

So many changes all around, but very often what happened in those far-off days can be remembered better than what happened last week! So much for old age!

*Leslie Smith*

\*Editors note: The Duke of Edinburgh, 2 Aldenham Road named after Prince Alfred Duke of Edinburgh (1844-1900); the second son of Queen Victoria.