

OXHEY VILLAGE ENVIRONMENT GROUP

July 1999

History Sheet No.17

MEMORIES of OXHEY

by Ruth Marshall

I was born in Upper Paddock Road in 1920. The first thing I remember as a child were the horses and carts opposite - Mr. Wilson had the Coal Merchants' business and they were kept there. We could see them out of the window and we loved to see them going up and down the road, about twelve altogether. We used to wait for them coming home at tea-time. I had five sisters and three brothers. One brother still lives in Upper Paddock Road, in the house that we were born in, and a sister lives in Vale Road.

My parents were from Essex, a farming family. My grandmother used to come to see us about once a year, up from Essex. We looked forward to that - we used to rush home from school to see Granny Smith, on my mother's side. I just remember my grandfather at Hatfield. We used to go to spend a day in the holidays. He used to have a pig farm - we loved going there.

I went to school in Oxhey, where Faithfield is now, until I was eleven. I started school quite early, before I was five, I was very anxious to go because my older sisters were going, and I wanted to go along with them. When I was eleven I went to the London Road school, which is now the Health Centre, until I was fourteen. Then I was put into service and we grew up to be very useful in the house. Some people think we used to work very long hours in those days, but I didn't think they were too bad. I started at 8am, and I used to get home about half past four or five. The pay wasn't very good - 8/- a week.

When I was still at school, we used to go down to the woods at Oxhey (where the golf links are now) to play - it was quite safe in those days Mum used to pack food up for us and bottles of lemonade, and we would come back with baskets of blackberries, which Mother made into jam. We would play all day there in the woods - we used to call it 'Sandpits' I don't know why.

My father had an allotment, up by the reservoir, so we always had lots of fresh vegetables. Of course meat was cheap in those days, and Mother made lovely meat puddings. She didn't have a gas cooker, but used an oven by the coal fire. Of course it all had to be black leaded and kept clean. There was a lot of work to be done, but we all had our little duties. On a Saturday morning, one of the children would go into Watford to get a bit of shopping, and another would scrub the kitchen table, which was white wood, and another would have to wash the floor - we all had a job to do, to help Mother, because she had so much to do. We got a penny a week as pocket money. We queued up on Saturday at midday when Dad got home and he would say: "I don't know what you're all waiting for," and laugh and give us a penny. Then we would go down to the shop at the bottom of Paddock Road, and see what we could get for our penny - which was quite a lot! There was a little shop in Haydon Road - the one that's the chemist now, which was a sweet shop then where we used to get things like gob-stoppers and something that looked like glass and had a kind of string through it - very sweet, sugary and we used to get a pennyworth of that, and gums of course - all those that you get out of jars.

We had a sports day at school - we went to Watford, I think the West Herts Sports ground. I liked netball and was in the team. I can remember a very hard winter when we could skate on the pond in Attenborough's Fields. Oxhey Grange used to have Open Days and we went and did dancing in our school groups in our white dresses.

I left my service job when I was fifteen, and went to work at Loveday's I liked it there because you met more people, but it was a long day from eight in the morning till eight o'clock at night. Those were the shop hours in those days. After a few years with Loveday's I went into Watford to Spurrier's and Hemmings.

During the War I was called up and, although I was married I didn't have a family then, so was sent to the Engineering Works at the Sun Engraving, on a floor at the very top where they made shell caps where I was put on a little machine. I worked there until my son was born in 1944, when I left. The street party for VE day was in 1945 when my son was 15 months old.

Transcript of tape recording of, Ruth Marshal on 16/4/93.

