

OXHEY VILLAGE ENVIRONMENT GROUP

September 1999

History Sheet No.18

RECOLLECTIONS

Ellen Crawley - Oxhey Chapel - Oxhey Place

My name is Ellen Dilks of No. 5 Watford Heath and what follows is part of my family history and some of my early recollections.

My grandmother, then Ellen Crawley, was born on December 26, 1852 and was the first child christened in Oxhey Chapel after its restoration. Until her death in 1900, her mother was keeper of the chapel.

When my father, Herbert Neville Dilks was born in 1880, the Rev Newton-Price was his godfather. Dad's father Neville was in St. Matthews choir where the Rev Newton-Price had taken over when the church was built in 1880. In time, my father was also to sing in that same choir. When dad was about nine months old the family came to live at No. 1 Watford Heath. This cottage together with No. 2 were previously the staff cottages for the National School. My grandmother Ellen Crawley attended this school.

The Rev Newton-Price started a cookery school at the back of the National School, later to become No 5 Watford Heath where my mother and father lived after marrying in 1920. Many years later when my daughter Frances attended the Newton-Price Institute of Domestic Economy in Watford she mentioned that it originated in 5 Watford Heath where she was born. The tutor told her not to be silly, but had to apologise to her the following week having found out that this was in fact true.

My parents met when dad went to repair a chimney at Oxhey Place, the home of the Blackwell family (of Cross & Blackwell fame), where mum was in service. From quite a young age I was often taken by my grandmother over to Oxhey to see her sister Emma (Mrs Allen), who did the laundry for the Blackwell family.

I can still remember the washing at different stages in Aunt Emma's kitchen, some boiling in the copper, some drying by the kitchen, others being ironed and aired. If I close my eyes I can recall the lovely smell of clean washing and see busy Aunt Emma, a small rosy cheeked lady.

Sometimes on these trips my brother Herbert Neville junior came along. Once when we were on our way over to aunty's a storm blew up and Gran said: "You won't see Aunt Emma when we get there, she'll be shut in a cupboard; she's terrified of storms, and won't come out until it's all over!" Another time Gran told how they used to crawl through the small culverts under the railway near the Cow Arch. I was later to do the same thing and my granddaughter has shown her small daughter the place where I ventured with my friends. Besides doing the laundry, Aunt Emma also rang the Chapel bell. There was a service at the Chapel on the first Sunday of every month.

When I was about 14 years old we were invited to Anthony Blackwell's wedding. I went with mum, gran, her two sisters and some of the neighbours. It was a lovely day, and I remember especially being announced on entering the drawing room, and mum recalling her memories of when she worked there.



When Tony Blackwell died his widow moved down to the country and she wanted my father to move with her and do all the work that needed doing. We would have a cottage for life, but his heart was in Oxhey so he only travelled down to advise her, doing a little of the work with the help of his friend George Field who lived in Capel Road.

Gran and Grandad celebrated their Diamond Wedding in 1938, just a month before Grandad died. In 1941 after her daughter Edith was killed in an air raid in London, Gran came to live with us at No. 5 Watford Heath and died two years later in her 90th year.