

OXHEY VILLAGE ENVIRONMENT GROUP

December 1997

History Sheet No.12

No. 57 - The Centre of My Universe

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We lived at No.57 Villiers Road a narrow but deep terrace house, having moved from London some-time in the early '40s, and it was my home until I married in 1964.

The period 1946-56 was perhaps the exciting period, coming out of childhood and into early teens. At various times during this period my best friends were Eddie Evans, (the Oxhey 'orror, as my mother called him), Pete Batsford, Raymond Sweeting and, when we were not fighting them, the Edgar boys, Tommy and Jimmy. Eddie lived next door to a shop which I think was a confectioners. It was next to the chip shop. Raymond lived the other side. The Edgar boys lived opposite. Villiers Road is quite long and embraced several communities. At the bottom lived the Pollards, Roger Pollard was a sort of friend. I got to know him because my father kept the car in a yard opposite his house. I imagine that the car had to be in a garage as it was a company car, possibly the first in the road. Dad worked for the British Thomson-Houston Company as a cinematic engineer. The car was the first of many, a Morris 8 KWE 442. We called it the Kiwi car. Also at the bottom were some large houses which were rather spooky. A family called Lloyd lived in one of these.

The first focal point was the crossroads where Capel Road and Lower Paddock Road crossed Villiers. Here were: Dyson's the Chemist, Loveday's the Baker, Palmers for Perfect Provisions, the Post Office and, the first of four pubs - a Benskins house - *The Rifle Volunteer*. Mr. Dyson was an Attlee-esque figure who would loom out from, behind those large jars of tincture and lotion and catch me leering at the *Health and Efficiency* magazines he kept in a glass fronted cupboard just inside the door. There was always a Bunsen burner flickering at the back of the shop. I went into the chemist's to buy saltpetre and sulphur to make gunpowder.

My mother worked for Stan Palmer. He owned a 14 HP Wolseley which we thought was the best car in the road. His shop was spotless and smelt of smoked ham. I helped on occasions, sorting tins of biscuits and making up orders for delivery in the green Austin van driven by Peter Allen. Mr. Palmer would let me eat unlimited quantities of broken biscuits. Naturally I soon realised that if I broke them I could eat more. Charlie Hill was the manager. He was very smart and, with a sharp pencil always behind the ear, efficient and fast. Everything was done at the double he spoke like a machine-gun and could garrotte a cheese to within an ounce. A flash of wire, a sweep up to get the pencil, a rapid mark in the little red order book and another sweep up of the spotless white arm and the pencil was back behind the ear for all the world as though nothing had moved. I was petrified of him.

Just across the road from Palmer's was a bungalow where Mike Hemley lived. He had a green Raleigh tricycle that I coveted. His mother, a rather grand lady, did not approve of me and I was forbidden to ride it. I think I took it one day and smashed it into the wall outside *The Pah*, a nice house next to Paimer's (Mr. Wilson lived here, he tutored Brian to pass the 11+ and get into Watford Grammar School. I also passed but failed the interview and instead went to Victoria Secondary Modern in Watford.) I probably blamed the damage onto some other child.

My territory started much nearer to No.57. First there was the large house 'next to Avenue Terrace