

which, in our opinion, was haunted but had a large front garden into which we could sneak in to play. It was behind a very high wall and was dark and overgrown. I think it was called Thurston Lodge. Opposite lived a very pretty girl, Carol Jefferies. She was one of those totally lovely and totally unobtainable girls. I never found out what school she went to and never, spoke to her. I tried to date her, using Lesley Green who lived at No.51 as an agent, but she was not interested. Next door to us at No.55 was Bob and Dolly Hunt. These two also scared me. Bob was a bus driver. He would tick me off just for looking at his plum tree, but then scrumping, for me, was an art form. On hot, lazy summer afternoons we would carry out our famed "Locust raids" on Mr. Monk's garden. He lived at No.63 and tended some lovely fruit trees and bushes. Sliding on our stomachs we would cross the gardens of Nos.59 and 61 there being only a rudimentary wire fence, and raid the gooseberries, redcurrants, blackcurrants and cherries. Massive stomach cramps and long sessions in the toilet were occupational hazards. Besides he threw stones at our cats so we considered it a fair exchange. My father had tried to keep a beautiful garden but our re-enactment of the latest film we had seen in Watford ensured that it matched the dump in Lower Paddock Road. One particular film that held us enthralled was the Ealing production *Hue and Cry*, all about a gang that used a comic to pass messages about planned robberies. It was filmed in the bomb sites of London.

The Laws were at No.61. The two sons, Roland and Sid were quite a bit older than us and were very involved in motor sport. Sid owned a grass track motor bike which he would push-start along the common back alley - which started at Mrs. Dilk's scullery door and ended at ours. The 500cc JAP speedway engine would shatter the peace, and hot methanol fumes would drift in and intoxicate us. These two were real rebels. Sometimes they would be joined by the 'Reverend' Johnson with his BSA and Jim Rogers, who worked at the Lewis, Ellis and Foster motorcycle shop in Rickmansworth Road near Croxley Green station. They were our heroes. The Law's garden shed stank of Castrol R and inner tubes. Brian and I spent many hours cleaning and repairing the bikes, and going to all the tracks. We loved it, but I think the neighbours hated it. At No.65 lived my aunt Kate (Fincham) and uncle Tom. She was a very rotund and fearsome lady who was also very kind. I think Tom did as he was told. Her back door was never shut and I could walk in at any time for a chat and scrounge an apple or two. Next door to her was the mysterious Miss Field. We were told she was bed-ridden - we thought that she was too lazy to get up. We were not told anything more about her so made it all up and referred to her as *the strange lady behind the net curtains*. The last house in the terrace was Mrs. Dilk's. Another formidable lady. At some time my father had moved the car from the bottom of the road to a garage in Dilk's garden. I had tried to drive it but panicked and backed it over some vegetables or something. Dad probably got blamed but it was unlikely he guessed it was his 11 year old son.

Opposite 57 was the second pub, *The Prince of Wales*. It had a very, smelly outside toilet, a roofless tin sheet lean-to affair. When I was an eight year old I thought it very daring to nip in for a pee even though I lived over the road. I was caught in there one evening by the "Welsh Coalminer". (He was neither Welsh nor a coal miner but Irish and always covered in black dust. It was our code name for him.) He just stood there rocking gently muttering something about 'beer making him ill'. I ran out and up to the chip shop. This would mean running past Mr. Morse's house a dangerous practice as the pavement was likely covered with oil which had leaked from a large marine engine that had been stored on his front steps for years and years. Mr. Morse was an eccentric engineer who owned an Ariel *Square Four* motorcycle which was frequently rebuilt at the kerbside, adding to the oil. At least those of us with bikes could skid them through it, imitating Sid Law, our grasstrack hero. The motorbike had a sidecar chassis attached, to which was bolted an old bus seat. An elderly lady, with a permanently attached headscarf, would be perched on this seat and the whole outfit would be driven off at speed by the twitching Mr. Morse. I never knew who this unfortunate woman was.

The chip shop was owned by the Linsley brothers. I was not tall enough to see over the counter so would creep round the side and gaze at the coke-fired range by Ford of Halifax. It was quite normal for me to leave my bike on the wide steps outside overnight. It was always there in the morning. The